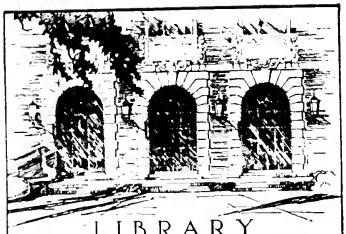
BEGGAR MY NEIGHBOUR



BEGGAR MY NEIGHBOUR

"Die Kunst reich zu werden, ist im Grunde nichts Anderes, als die Kunst sich des Eigenthums anderer Leute mit ihrem guten Willen zu bemächtigen."—WIELAND.

BEGGAR MY NEIGHBOUR

A NOVEL

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES

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PART II.

(*CONTINUED.*)

BEGGAR MY NEIGHBOUR.

CHAPTER VIII.

DISCARDED.

"Come not when I am dead
To drop thy foolish tears upon my grave."
—TENNYSON.

"MARCIN," said aunt Robertine, "here is your soup." She said it in a whisper as mysterious as though she were saying to a prisoner, "Here are your chains," or to a paid assassin, "Here is the dagger."

Marcin was leaning back in his chair, with his eyes closed, and his arms hanging limp beside him.

He did not seem to have heard his aunt's address.

"Marcin," she said again, reluctantly—raising her voice, "here is your soup."

There was no response and no movement.

"He is asleep," said Robertine; and she stole down

the gravel walk on tiptoe, for his chair stood in the garden, and took the soup to the kitchen fire to be kept warm, holding the cup jealously covered the whole time for fear of any indiscreet eye prying into its contents and discovering the nature of the compound. This falling asleep in his chair was a common occurrence with Marcin now. He had been more usually asleep than awake for weeks past; and the difference between his sleeping and his waking state had grown to be so very slight, that it was not easy to distinguish the two. He had given up expressing any wish, or apparently feeling any. Even the idea of getting out of bed in the morning, or into bed in the evening, seemed not to occur to him unless directly suggested. He sat in his chair from morning to night not reading, not speaking, not even listening to the talk around him; looking every day a little paler, a little weaker, a little thinner, and falling asleep now and then for ten and twenty minutes at a time.

On this occasion he slept longer. Robertine, peering out of the kitchen door, saw no difference in the position of the sleeping Marcin. It was a warm afternoon, but the clouds were drifting overhead; and Robertine looked up at them apprehensively, and down again anxiously at her sleeping nephew. It was certainly going to rain; the swallows were flying so low that they almost grazed Marcin's hair; but the

swallows did not seem to disturb him in his sleep. The gnats were humming loudly by his ear, but neither did the gnats awake him. There was a distant growl of thunder in the sky: Marcin slept on and heard no thunder. Not even the big drops which fell on his upturned face—the first drops of the storm —were cold enough or big enough to rouse him from his dreams.

"I must wheel him in asleep," said Robertine, as she reached the chair and turned it rapidly towards the house. She wheeled it on a few paces, then all at once she stood still with a start, and remained thus, standing immovable in the middle of the pathway, quite forgetting the falling rain-drops. Her hand had touched the back of Marcin's neck, and that touch had made her start, for the spot was cold as ice. She peered down at him with a gaze of horror, then with an effort stretched out her hand again and touched his—cold also and stiff; for, gathering courage, she lifted it now, and it fell back heavy and rigid, and swung helplessly beside him.

He was dead, and must have been dead for two hours at least. It could not be called a sudden death, this end that had come so gradually; for he had faded day by day before their eyes, and yet it brought with it all the terror which belongs to sudden death. The fever had given to his constitution a shock from

which it had never recovered. Like his mother, he had seemed to rally from illness only to sink under its after effects.

And so it came to pass that a second time this summer a coffin was brought to the Wowasulka house, and again there was a darkened room and wax-candles dimly burning round a bed. But the wax-candles were fewer this time, and there were no blooming violet-wreaths, for the violets were past long ago. The rather meagre bunches of roses—cut by Lucyan from the branches where they would be least missed —were far from rivalling the memory of those violets. Even that little life had left behind it a greater blank than was left now. Marcin's life or Marcin's death made so little difference to anybody, either good or bad, there was no word either of praise or blame to be pronounced in his memory.

The mourners watched around him in silence and awe, scarcely can it be said in grief. How could they honestly say that they wished he had lived, when the expression of peaceful contentment on the dead man's face seemed to be saying so distinctly that he was glad he had died? for it was much the clearest solution of all difficulties, and the simplest way to avoid all trouble, — if he could not have a quiet life, let him at least have a quiet death! There was a general though unacknowledged feeling of relief when the

day of the funeral came, and the hour of the funeral approached.

"Are the screw-nails ready?" asked Lucyan, as they stood round the open coffin. "Xenia, you had better go away."

The screw-nails were ready; they were produced. They were about to be put to their proper use, and Xenia was just preparing to leave the room, when there suddenly arose in the passage outside a strange and unaccountable noise.

A woman's voice was heard in loud and vehement expostulation with other voices. There were entreaties and threats, remonstrances and replies: there were stamps, and rustlings, and banging of doors, and every other variety of noise which, under the circumstances, was possible.

At least half-a-dozen women must be forcing their way in, thought the listeners in the darkened room; but in the same moment the closed door flew open with a resounding crash, and there stood upon the threshold the author of the commotion, having, to every one's surprise, resolved herself into one woman alone. Upon the shrouded room and the black-clothed spectators this woman burst like a substantial flash of lightning. Her scarlet petticoat seemed to flame brighter than the candles, her cheeks were flushed to as brilliant a red; she was panting, she was covered

with dust from head to foot, and her shawl had been half torn off her shoulders in the struggle of forcing her passage.

"Where is he?" she panted, standing still on the threshold, and staring before her into the darkened room, for the glare of daylight was still in her eyes. "Where is he?" she said louder, as no one gave her an answer. Then turning towards the bed, and seeing that there lay nothing but a few crushed rose-heads, she shuddered with such violence that the whole room seemed to shudder with her. "Ah, he is there!" She had caught sight of the open coffin; and with a spring forward, and a shriek which rent the ears of the bystanders, she flung herself on her knees beside it, clutching at Marcin's cold hand, and overturning two candlesticks in the action. The necessity of stamping out the burning candles was the first thing which brought the stupefied spectators back to their senses. The whole incident had been so sudden and so rapid, that as yet they had only stood and stared in bewilderment. Was it possible that, after all, that useless life had left a blank behind it, greater than they could guess?

"Marcin!" cried the sobbing woman on her knees—"Marcin! why was I not sent for? Why was I not told? Why did I not know? You would not have died if I had been with you! Oh, it is unjust, cruel!

You were not meant to die. They let you go, because they did not care to keep you; but I—I want you back again. Oh, Marcin!"

She was rocking her body from side to side, as she uttered her wild complaints; groaning and beating her breast, and covering the hand she held with resounding kisses, until it seemed as though she would drag the corpse out of the coffin.

"This will not do," said Lucyan, sternly; "this cannot possibly go on."

"A painful and distressing occurrence," said Robertine, with gloomy indignation.

"But who is she?" asked Xenia, trembling in the background.

The shock touched every one present as disagreeable—the dead man himself seemed to resent this violent disturbance of his repose.

"Leave me in peace!" the look on his face appeared to say.

Lucyan had stepped up to the woman already and touched her on the shoulder. "You must leave this," he said, coldly. "The coffin is to be closed."

"Leave him! Do you know who I am?"

"Yes." For she had raised her face, as she put the fierce question; and Lucyan knew her to be the apothecary's daughter.

"And you imagine that I shall leave him?"

"I insist that you shall leave him."

"Force me if you can!" She sprang to her feet and stood in an attitude of defence, looking quite capable of flying at Lucyan and grappling with him. "You have no right to forbid me anything; you were only his brother, and I——"

"Enough of this," said Lucyan, with some vivacity; "we cannot have these sort of—delicate explanations here. If you have anything to say——"

"I have something to say."

"Come with me then." He took her by the arm and drew her across the room towards another door. The door opened and closed behind the two, and they were alone together.

Janina sank on to a chair and sat there, facing Lucyan, and panting for breath. And Lucyan stood opposite to her, gazing at her flushed face, and reflecting that his brother Marcin had shown rather good taste while he lived. Janina's cheeks were flaming still, and the violence of her gestures had brought her hair down: it hung in a rough, tangled, but not by any means unbecoming mass, down her neck and back.

Although the Marszalek had made his exit from the next room in what was apparently a burst of virtuous indignation, the burst had subsided in a most curious fashion as soon as the door was closed. He contem-

plated the woman before him with an approvingly critical eye; the eye of a connoisseur, who has grown practised with experience. It was with much the same gaze that he was accustomed to contemplate the pictures of pretty women which had once hung on the wall of his room. He had taken them down from the wall long ago; for a Marszalek, and more so a Marszalek who is a married man, requires to make some sacrifices to his position,—but he kept them in a drawer instead, which was less convenient, though safer.

"Compose yourself, my dear young lady," remarked Lucyan, after a minute, seeing that the young lady was very far from composing herself. His tone was not in the least stern now.

"Composure? Calmness? Resignation?" she broke out, shooting off the three words with the suddenness of three rockets. "Don't dare to speak to me of any of those hateful things. Why did you let him die? If I had but known that he was going to die, when I saw him last week! Ah, he was so tired then! he sent me away; he said I made too much noise. Oh, if I only could get him back, I should never make any noise again—never in all my life!" and she burst, as she said it, into a remarkably noisy fit of tears. "I should be as quiet as a mouse," she sobbed, getting up from her chair and stamping

violently about the room, in the excess of her excitement.

"I loved him desperately," she exclaimed, through the thick of her stormy tears.

"I am sure of it," said Lucyan, in a tone of soothing concession.

"And he loved me desperately."

Lucyan said that he had no doubt of it, although it was rather difficult to imagine Marcin having done anything desperately.

"Did he not tell you?" she asked, standing still in front of him.

"It was not Marcin's way to tell things."

"I thought he might have told you," she said in disappointment; "he had half promised on the last day I saw him."

"No, he told me nothing, but——"

"But what?"

"Well, I rather think I guessed."

"You guessed?" she questioned, breathlessly. "What?"

"Since she will have plain speaking," thought Lucyan, "let her have it." Then aloud—"That my brother was your lover."

She broke into a brilliant smile through the midst of her tears. "Of course he was my lover; but he was something else: guess—it is not difficult."

Lucyan shrugged his shoulders and shook his head, as much as to say that he could not guess that riddle.

"My husband!" she burst out triumphantly. "He was my husband: I was Marcin's wife."

The listener smiled and remained silent.

"You did not guess that, did you?"

"No, I did not."

"And we were married four years; have I not kept the secret well?"

"Most marvellously well."

"It was very hard work to hold my tongue," she went on, while the glow of childish exultation dried up the tears on her cheek. "I made Marcin call me by my real name every time he came to see me, and I signed myself by it over and over again in my Prayer-book, but I tore the page out and burnt it. I was ready to burst out with it every time I met any member of the family. If I had not given Marcin a solemn promise to keep it secret, I should not have been able to see the carriage pass with your wife in it without calling out aloud, 'I am Madame Bielinska as well as you!'" and Janina, carried away by the thought of the triumph which that would have been, actually burst out laughing, while the tears were still on her cheek.

"Will you not drink a glass of water, my dear Panna Wronska?" asked Lucyan, pouring out a tumblerful,

and holding it towards her; "your nerves are a little overstrained, I fancy."

"Pani Bielinska," she corrected him, still laughing hysterically, as she put out her hand towards the water.

He was silent; and looking up impatiently for his answer, their eyes met full. The tumbler crashed to the ground, and with a shriek she flew towards him.

"You do not believe me!" she cried. "I see you do not believe that I was married!"

"Pray be calm."

"Do you believe that I was married?" she panted, with flaming eyes.

"I am not a child," said Lucyan, quietly.

"You are a monster, then."

"Indeed I am not. I quite agree with you in the main; you are perfectly right to keep to your assertion."

"It is not an assertion; it is a fact."

"No woman is bound to give anything but the best account of herself," went on Lucyan, disregarding her interruption. "It may amuse you to call yourself Madame Bielinska, but"—with a shrug—"you can scarcely expect other people to do so."

"I not only expect, I shall insist on it," said Janina, with a sudden dignity, which took him by surprise. "I was your brother's wife, and I am his widow."

"You have no claim," answered Lucyan, quickly, for her manner had struck him strangely. To do him justice, up to this moment Lucyan had not believed her story, taking for granted that her mind was unhinged by grief. He had always looked upon his brother Marcin as a fool, but he did not think that Marcin could have been quite fool enough for this. Now, however, the sudden assurance of Janina's tone impressed him as genuine; he was too keen a judge of human nature not to see that she was speaking the truth; but, at the same time, he was too excellent a tactician not to see that his own interest lay in keeping up the disbelief. If Marcin *had* married her, so much the worse for her; he had no right to marry an apothecary's daughter, and the apothecary's daughter had no right to marry him; she must suffer for her folly. Therefore he answered quickly, "You have no claim."

"I shall get my rights," said Janina; for the word "claim" had aroused her practical instinct; and the practical instinct in her was so strong, that floods of tears had not sufficed to drown it.

"What do you mean by rights?"

"The name first, the money afterwards," said Janina, bluntly.

"Marcin left all his money to me," was Lucyan's answer.

"He did not; he made no will."

"He left it me by word of mouth."

"Who says it?"

"I do."

"And there is nothing but your word for it?"

"There is no one's word against it. Do you propose to put up your word against mine?" sneered Lucyan.

"Of course I do; a widow's rights are better than a brother's."

"Strange," said Lucyan, with another sneer, "that you should come out with this wonderful story the moment that Marcin is beyond contradicting it."

"Contradicting it! He was to have told it you himself, if he had lived another week. This is how it was: That time, four years ago, when I promised Marcin to keep the secret, I made him give me another promise in exchange. If ever we had,"—she hesitated for a moment, hanging her head and colouring—then looking up straight again, she went on boldly: "If ever we had the hope of a child, then he would declare the marriage; do you understand?"

Lucyan slightly inclined his head to show that he understood, but there was no sign on his face to show that he believed.

"Well," faltered Janina, "I have had to wait a long time; but—but my child—our child will be born this autumn."

"Unfortunate!" muttered Lucyan to himself, but Janina did not hear him.

"You believe me now?" she pleaded, in a softened tone. "You believe that my child will be a Bielinski?"

Lucyan evaded her eye; turning away, he shrugged his shoulders in silence.

"Why do you not answer?"

"Why do you force me to give you unpleasant answers?"

"Ah, you do not believe? You will not accept me?" she cried, with a return of her excitement. "You shall be forced to do so all the same."

"I don't think so," said Lucyan.

"I shall prove it."

"How?"

"Why, by the marriage register, of course; we were married in the Tarajow church."

She had scarcely said the words when there shot into her eyes a look of panic. A sudden terrible thought had struck her, and the same thought had struck Lucyan in the same moment; but to him it was not terrible.

"The Tarajow church is burnt down," they both said in the same breath, and they stood looking at each other in silence, measuring each other with their eyes. Lucyan was far too well trained to make a vulgar display of the relief and the triumph which

that thought had brought him, but one flash of exultation he could not suppress, and Janina saw that flash in his eyes.

"But there are other things," she cried wildly; "there is the priest who married us."

"Is that the priest who went mad two years ago?" asked Lucyan, calmly.

"Yes, yes—but——" She began to tremble, feeling the ground slipping from under her feet. Up to this moment, with all her excitement and indignation, she had not really been alarmed; she had not really thought otherwise but that he should be forced in time to bow to the truth of her story. Now only did she begin to tremble.

"And," went on Lucyan, "I suppose you have no one but your father to support this—excuse me—ridiculous story of a marriage?"

"My father! My father knew nothing of it. I kept it even from him; but there must be something else; there must be a way——"

"Of course there is a way. If you imagine that you have any rights, and if you happen to have any money to spend on a lawsuit—it must be plenty of money, mind—try that way by all means."

Lucyan was smiling again by this time; for from the moment that he heard of a Russian church, the last shade of apprehension had vanished. He knew

well that, from the slovenliness of such a ceremony, there need be no fear of witnesses, nor of legal attestations.

"I have no money—none at all!" cried Janina, all her short-lived dignity gone, and bursting into miserable tears as she saw each support, at which in turn she wildly grasped, crumbling under her hand. She would not give up yet. It was impossible that this monstrous wrong could be done. Convinced as she was of the justice of her cause, it did not seem conceivable that others should be blind to it. She stormed, and sobbed, and protested, and Lucyan looked on without flinching, watching the bright crimson in her cheeks, and showing in his eyes how becoming he thought it; humouring her, and professing to soothe her; neither agreeing nor contradicting; goading her on to madness by his smile and by his gaze.

"Pray be calm, Panna Wronska," he said at last, when the spectacle had begun to wear him, and he laid his hand on her shoulder. She flung it off violently, gasping for breath in her despair.

"Do not dare to call me that! Oh, but I will force you to believe me! I will swear by everything that you hold holy—I will swear on the crucifix." She glanced round as though in search of one.

"Don't take the trouble, my dear child," said

Lucyan, with the slightest shrug in the world; "such ceremonies do not convince me."

"Perhaps you do not believe in the crucifix?"

Lucyan turned away with a second edition of the shrug. "We are not here for discussing our religious principles, are we?"

Janina stood and stared at the man before her in horror; and Lucyan returned the stare with a gaze of admiration which every moment grew more insolent. She paled before it, instead of reddening. Slowly the excitement began to fade from her face.

"Ah, you are calming down," said Lucyan; "that is right. It would have been a pity to spoil your pretty face with more tears. Don't you think so?"

"Yes," she said, with a sudden change of tone, while a stony hardness began to settle over her features. She drew a deep breath, setting her teeth with an audible click, and all the time her eyes hung full on Lucyan in a strained and penetrating gaze which he could not understand.

"You will go home now, will you not? We have nothing more to talk about."

"And my child? your brother's child?" she asked, heavily.

"I regret the circumstance," was Lucyan's cool answer. Janina did not appear to have heard him, for she made no movement whatever. He drew a

little nearer, encouraged by this unexpected quiet. "You will dry those black eyes now, won't you? You are so good-looking, my dear child, that you will always find plenty more men to tell you so. Did no one ever tell you so but Marcin?" He laughed.

"No one," said Janina, slowly, uttering the words with evident difficulty; but she did not dry her eyes; she had not moved them yet from Lucyan's face.

Then they will tell you so soon, depend upon it." He put his hand down again on her shoulder, and this time she did not fling it off, she only shuddered as it touched her, and closed her eyes for a moment as if at a sickening sight.

"I will go now," she said the instant after, speaking with that same strange slow thickness of utterance; and, without further warning, she turned quite steadily on her heel and walked back the way she had come.

Staring full and straight before her she went through the room, not looking at any of the people standing there; not glancing even towards the coffin, which now was closed. With a firm hand she opened the door and closed it behind her. Her steps were heard going down the passage. There was one more distant bang of the door, and she was gone.

Lucyan stood where she had left him, and combed his hair reflectively. "I suppose she will not drown

herself," he said, thinking of the dull stare of her eyes. "It would not do; it would look ill." He reflected for another moment, then laughed aloud. "Straw-fire," he muttered; "all straw-fire. Tell a woman she is pretty, and the flames go out at once."

CHAPTER IX.

ALL KNAVES.

". . . She is his slave ; she has become
A thing I weep to speak." . . .
—SHELLEY.

WHEN Kazimir said to Xenia, "Lucyan shall have the papers," there had been suspicions in his mind; and when, shortly after that—it had been before Marcin's death—he had brought a packet of papers to Lucyan, he openly taxed his brother with some questions. Lucyan was provoked, and somewhat alarmed; he had not meant the papers to come to him in this way; the whole thing should have been managed between Kazimir and Xenia alone; it was to have been taken in a lighter, less solemn sense,—viewed from the sentimental, not from the business-like point of view. Xenia had certainly mistaken her instructions. But he was equal to the occasion: there could scarcely be any possible occasion to which Lucyan would not be equal. When Kazimir questioned him about the

Propinacya, Lucyan volunteered every possible information.

"Would you believe it?" he said, with an access of extra-frankness; "the Propinacyas now pay me four thousand florins a-year!"

The assertion was perfectly true. "I had to put a lot of money into them, of course," he added, "before I could get so much out,—renovations, repairs, improvements, and so on." This was true also: Lucyan had newly whitewashed the Propinacya building within the last year or two.

He was carelessly turning over the papers before him as he spoke. "Old letters," he observed, while with his sharp eye he marked that the paper he wanted was not among them. "Nothing but old letters; I suppose they can be burnt? You don't happen to know, do you, where you have put that paper about the Propinacya which I sent you once? Looking over old accounts the other day, I found that I had mislaid my own duplicate. I should have liked to copy it again."

"I looked for it," said Kazimir, "but I did not find it; I remember now having torn it up long ago."

"Ah! torn up? What an unbusiness-like habit to tear up business papers! *Quelle étourderie!* Are you quite sure you tore it up?"

"Quite sure."

"Well, it is of no consequence. I merely wanted to glance at it;—that Propinacya is a constant subject of worry."

"It is Aitzig Majulik who holds it still?" asked Kazimir.

"Yes, it is Aitzig Majulik."

"And what—I have thought of asking you this before—what has become of the old Jew who used to hold the lease?"

"Naftali Taubenkübel? I believe he is gone to the bad,—probably dead by this time."

Kazimir remembered that his mother had always talked of Naftali Taubenkübel as of a faithful servant. "Why was Naftali sent away?" he asked.

"Really I cannot remember," said Lucyan, with a yawn. "He did not suit, I suppose; I have so much to think of that I cannot waste reflection upon old Jews. You have no notion what trouble an estate like this gives. Don't you think the place is wonderfully improved?"

"Most remarkably so."

"It was very hard work, of course," said Lucyan, with a sigh of great humility; "but the drudgery of work has always been my fate, as the brilliancy of soldiery has always been yours, Kazio." It did not often suit Lucyan to remember that he was the younger brother; but in spite of all that had passed, he was

able, at convenient moments, to play the part with an admirable grace and dexterity. "Work alone, I confess, would scarcely have done it; my wife's money went a long way. Wowasulka would have been nothing without a capital to fall back upon."

"I suppose not," said Kazimir, doubtfully.

"And between ourselves, my dear Kazimir," laughed Lucyan, "Xenia would have been nothing without the money either." Kazimir held his tongue, though his heart burnt with indignation. "If ever you marry," said Lucyan, "take care that your wife's charms should be backed up by something solid."

Kazimir turned and left the room in silence, for he felt that it would not be prudent to stay; and Lucyan, as the door closed, drew a breath of relief. He had long noted that remark to be made about Xenia's fortune having been put into the estate. There would be no danger now of Kazimir ever recurring to the rest of those fourteen thousand florins which had never been paid. Meanwhile Kazimir was fuming outside. If Lucyan chose to speak disparagingly of his wife—and this was not the first time that Kazimir had been tortured by these sneering hints—what right had he to rebel? And yet he could not trust himself to stay in the room for fear of knocking his brother down. He had never got over his first repugnance to see those two together; he could not see Lucyan kiss his

wife, or as much as touch her hand, without feeling the strong desire to rush between them. His blood boiled at sight of the half-contemptuous admiration with which Lucyan's eyes rested on her, and of the scientifically calculating system after which her beauty was displayed and traded upon; for Lucyan guarded her and cared for her as for a distinct portion of his wealth. His wife was as much a part of his fortune as his Propinacya or his corn-fields. To Kazimir it was absolute pain to witness the position in which she stood; to mark the slavish obedience, the abject humility, the nervous fear of the wife towards the husband; to see her flurry and her bewilderment, as, continually stung by a sarcasm which she could not understand, and tantalised by sneers which she did not know how to explain, she trembled in helpless dependence. It was slavery, it was degradation, it was insult. The sight of it was unbearable to Kazimir, and more unbearable still was it to see the way in which she accepted her position. If she had rebelled and refused obedience, Kazimir could have borne his own lot better. He lived in daily expectation of hearing that some catastrophe had taken place—of being told that since yesterday Xenia had flown from her husband's house; for he could not reconcile himself to the thought that she should submit to his treatment for long. It was intolerable to conceive

that she could accept her fate, and sink quietly down to the level to which Lucyan was forcing her.

And yet by this spectacle Kazimir was tortured. He was forced to stand by and watch her subjection without the right to raise a finger in her defence; he was forced to see how the weak will bent without a struggle before the strong one; and he had noted the flattered smile which would come to her face whenever her master vouchsafed her a mark of favour. Had her chains been of iron they might have oppressed her; but her chains were of gold, and their jingle pleased her. It was this spectacle that, of all Kazimir's trials, was the greatest. The truth had forced itself upon his eyes, though he preferred to turn his eyes away. He would not even yet blame her for the difference and the change in her; he would blame only Lucyan. But the difference was there. It was the difference between the fresh and the wired flower; between the rosebud on the bush and the rose which the gardener has forced open before its time, to flaunt in the centre of an elaborate bouquet. Any one can open a rosebud; you have only to blow upon it long enough and uncurl the petals with your fingers; but no one can close it again. It was only natural that Kazimir should turn his anger towards the gardener who had forced open the rosebud, rather than towards the rosebud which had been forced.

Taking these sentiments into consideration, it was fortunate that Kazimir did not hear the words which passed between the husband and wife that evening.

"The paper is torn up," said Lucyan, "so there was nothing to fear; but it is no thanks to you that there is no harm done. As it is," he muttered, "his suspicions are aroused."

"Listen, Xenia," he said to his wife; "the only way you can make up for your *maladresse*, is by keeping Kazimir in good humour. See, therefore, that you do it. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Xenia, slowly; and for a minute she gazed at her husband with a sort of helpless appeal in her eyes. Something was alarming her, something was oppressing her; in a vague and undefined way she was conscious of the danger into which she was being pushed. In the midst of her faltering weakness she would have kept herself straight if she could, only she did not know how.

"Well, is there anything you do not understand?" asked Lucyan, his attention for a moment arrested by the look on his wife's face.

"No, no, nothing." She shrank back at his tone; and Lucyan left the room.

He had commanded that the chestnuts should be got out of the ashes for him; and it never occurred to him to consider whether the poor cat was getting its

paws burnt or not. The natural consequence followed. Lucyan's commands were obeyed, and Kazimir was kept in good humour. Good humour, however, is scarcely the word to apply to his state of mind during this long, delicious, and terrible summer. He made no attempt to escape from the spell that was on him; he never stopped to analyse or reflect. What a difference there was between the first period of his love and the second! Then it had all been joyous, peaceful, and sweet; now it was feverish and fierce—a restless passion—one of those fires which burn all the higher the faster they approach consummation.

Thus week followed upon week, and flower replaced flower. The roses and carnations had long ago given up their rights to geraniums and flowering nasturtiums; and these, in their turn, were beginning to decamp in favour of dahlias and asters. To all outward appearance the life at Wowasulka was peaceful, as became a family in double mourning. That stormy episode at the funeral had been followed by no others; the straw-fire had only been a straw-fire after all, and had left no trace behind it.

Janina was another obstacle on Lucyan's path which required to be trodden down; and if he felt any regret in treading her down, it was only because her eyes were so black and her cheeks so pink.

"Of course she could not be a widow," had been

Xenia's verdict; "she was not in mourning—she had a red petticoat on;" while, in aunt Robertine's eyes, the one extenuating circumstance about the case was the general secrecy which seemed to have enveloped it. There was nothing more heard about the disposal of Marcin's money. In answer to a casual inquiry of Kazimir's, Lucyan mentioned that Marcin's small fortune had been left entirely to him (Lucyan). No one inquired into the matter or disputed the claim, and the Marszalek remained in peaceful possession.

There were few visits either made or received at this time; and if Aitzig Majulik often came to the house on business, and if the short-legged gentleman did occasionally get another dinner with rose-jam for dessert, neither of these two incidents could be regarded as dissipation. It was after one of these dinners, and when the short-legged gentleman had taken his departure, that Lucyan had another conversation with his wife. What he told her on that occasion took her entirely by surprise.

"But won't the smoke be very disagreeable?" she timidly objected.

"That smoke is worth more than gold to us," said Lucyan. "You will not object to having a little more money to spend, will you?"

"Oh no; but,"—a thought struck her,—"how will Vizia like it? She has often told me——"

"I cannot help Vizia," answered Lucyan, coldly. "Of course she will not like it."

"Oh, Lucyan! Poor Vizia! I am so sorry for her. She was so kind to me always; she took such care of me when I was little. Can't you do anything for her? Is it too late to change it now?"

"Much too late, even if I wanted to change it. You don't mean to say that you are crying, child? Who knows whether we may not be able now to spend the carnival in Lwów?"

"Do you think so?" asked Xenia, doubtfully, checking her tears for a moment to listen.

"It would not be impossible; and I have thought of an opera-box."

Xenia dried her eyes. "Oh yes, I should like that; and perhaps," with a brilliant idea, "we can take Vizia with us to the opera? Don't you think so, Lucyan?"

"Perhaps, if she cares to go," said Lucyan; and putting on his hat, he walked out into the garden.

He walked right through it to the end which bordered on the forest, and having reached the bottom of the slope, he stood looking up at the mass of rhododendron and *Pyrus japonica* bushes which he himself had planted there among the scattered rocks. The road wound up the slope, plunging right into the forest above; and to the right and to the left of it,

Lucyan's petted bushes stood. The trees of the forest-edge were beginning to turn yellow; but Lucyan's rocky shrubbery, untouched by autumn, climbed the hillside, cold, fresh, and ever green. Lucyan contemplated it with loving eyes, and with a pang of regret at his heart. He had placed each shrub and guided each ivy-trail with tender fingers; he had clothed the tall double rock, which he called his "twins," in its cloak of soft green drapery—had crowned it himself with that crest of waving fern; and now he was about to tear off the cloak and strike down the crest. He felt at this moment like a painter who is forced to destroy the picture he has painted. But the picture must be destroyed. He recognised the necessity; he allowed himself no more than one sigh of regret before he set to work to spoil his shrubbery, by transplanting each shrub in turn to a farther part of the garden, gradually unclothing the slope, and leaving it bare and rocky as it had been in former days. October is the usual month for such transplanting operations; and the reasons which prompted Lucyan to undertake them so early in September, must have been others than those advocated in the pages of the 'Florist's Guide.'

It was not of the 'Florist's Guide' that he was thinking, as he worked on steadily at his shrubs; and the smile which occasionally played round his lips had nothing to do with his rhododendrons or *Pyrus*

japonica. He worked on late until the evening, until the sun had set; and just about the time that he was laying down his tools, over at Tarajow the door of the synagogue was opening, and pouring out of it there was a long black stream of dark-robed figures. There were some of them that were clothed in the thinnest of woollen stuffs; there were some that wore caps of costly fur, like monstrous caterpillars curled around their heads, and others on whose caps there remained but a few mangy hairs to tell of the fur that had been; but all were alike black, and all were solemn of mien, for the *Szábas* was just over, and they were coming straight from their devotions.

The black stream, flowing towards the *Place,* began to break up into small black pools. Knots of speakers were scattered about; a nasal gabble rose and swelled through the air. Skinny necks craned, and sunken eyes glistening, betrayed the keen interest of the topic discussed. The vultures had pounced back upon the carrion which they had been forced to drop at the door of the house of prayer. They were pecking at it, worrying it, turning it over and over to see where there was yet another mouthful to be gained.

"Eighty per cent," says an old Jew, in satin as thick as a board, and with a beard that reaches his waist. "Eighty per cent—fair conditions, very fair conditions indeed."

"I would not have closed at any others," answered a second, who might have sat for a model of all the three patriarchs.

"Does she guess what is coming?" asks a third.

"She guesses nothing; but I have seen it coming long ago. Many a time has she sent for me and said, 'Moses Finsterbusch, I must have more money;' and I have said to myself, 'Moses Finsterbusch, open your money-bag and put in your hand; for, let her waste as she likes, will not those fields and that forest give you back your money ten and twenty fold?' Yes; I have seen it coming fast."

"It will be as fair a case of ruin as I have seen for many a day; a pretty case, a pretty case indeed!"

"And an exceptional case," laughs another Jew, softly; "we do not often get a woman by herself. A brother or a husband might have spoiled much, but she has no brother; no, and no husband either—nor will she get one."

A cackling chorus greeted the delicate joke, and the Jews drew to a closer circle, and fell to whispering amongst themselves rubbing their horny hands together—their vulture-eyes shining with cruel greed.

CHAPTER X.

TAKING THE TRICK AND LOSING THE HONOUR.

" . . . . . . No stroke,
No keenest, deadliest shaft of adverse fate
Can make the generous player quite despair."
—WHITEHEAD.

VIZIA awoke one morning and looked out of the window. It was so early still that a faint white mist hung over the landscape. That look out of the window, as the first thing on awaking, had become so much a habit with her as to be quite mechanical.

To-day she rubbed her eyes and looked again; there seemed to be something amissing in the landscape,—something gone that should have been there. It might be the effect of the mist, or it might be that she was still rather dazed with sleep. Surely between those two tree-stumps there used to stand a white post? But rubbing her eyes did no good; and the mist was not in fault either, for the mist was slowly clearing off, and no white post stood between the tree-stumps.

Neither was this post alone missing; three or four others had always been within range of the windows, and now they were all gone. No, not all; Vizia could just catch a glimpse of the last within sight, but as she was looking she saw it shake and slowly fall.

It looked like witchcraft, and it felt like a nightmare. There must be some mistake, and there must be an explanation of the mistake to be had for the asking. With an uneasy sense of disaster impending, Vizia hastily dressed and walked out. Lower and lower did her heart sink as she advanced. It was all becoming less like witchcraft, and more like a dreadful waking reality. There were the very holes in the earth, the empty sockets whence the posts had been wrenched, and there, further on, stood a cart, and upon it a heap of those same posts; while alongside, two men were engaged in uprooting another.

"They must be taking them up because the railway is going to be begun at once," said Vizia, resolutely; but although she repeated this conviction several times over, and said it aloud even to make it sound more plausible, yet the words did not encourage her as they ought. "I am sure it is that," she said to herself; "but I will ask those men, just to be quite certain."

The men were common peasants, just capable of giving an intelligible answer.

When was the railway to be begun? They did not know; they were not quite sure that they knew what a railway was. They had been told to knock in these posts last spring, and they had done so; and now they had been told to knock them out again, and they were doing so equally. That was all they knew, and all they cared.

Vizia returned to the house as wise as she had left it. But all hope of peace was gone for that day. It was useless to try to keep her thoughts from the white posts; it was impossible to fix them upon any of her household duties for more than five minutes at a time. She walked restlessly from one window to the other; she opened books and closed them again, after having held them for a short time upside-down in her hand; she began writing letters, and broke off half-way down the first page,—until at length, having tried to eat her dinner, and finding it impossible to get beyond the soup, she resolved to drive over to Wowasulka at once. It was hardly likely that they should know more about the matter than she did; but it was a chance at least, and she would try it.

When she reached Wowasulka, Xenia was not in the house; and going out in search of her, she caught sight at once of a group among the rocks of the devastated shrubbery. Lucyan was busy there with the last of his shrubs; and Xenia, sitting upon a piece of

flat rock, was watching him. Kazimir was there too; and in the background there lingered Aitzig Majulik, who had come there upon some business-errand (the factor was frequently seen about the place in these days, and always upon some indefinite business-errand), and who was waiting until it should please the Marszalek to attend to him.

As Vizia slowly walked along the gravel-path, she could see that Xenia was looking up at Kazimir, talking to him, and smiling at him. Then it appeared that her eyes had fallen on Vizia,—for she ceased her talk, and rose from her seat. But she did not come down the road to meet her cousin, as Vizia had expected: she stood for a moment irresolute, and then she turned in another direction, and went off by a path through the trees.

"Surely she must have seen me!" thought Vizia, with a sinking at her heart. "Can Xenia want to avoid me?" but she kept steadily on her way upwards, resolved to know her fate.

"Good evening," said Kazimir, coming a step towards her, with welcome on his face.

"Good evening," said Lucyan; but he scarcely raised his eyes to her as he said it, and instantly he bent them on his shrubs again.

Vizia had not meant to expose, without preparation, the real motive of her visit; but there was something

in Lucyan's look, and there were thoughts awakened by Xenia's unexplained flight, which made it impossible for her to make even a pretence at conventional talk.

"They have taken away the white posts at Lodniki," she said, without either preface or preamble.

No one gave any answer. Lucyan bent lower over his work; and Kazimir, struck by her gaze, looked inquiringly towards his brother.

"They have taken away my white posts," said Vizia again, and more distinctly this time.

"Really?" said Lucyan, forced this time, in common politeness, to raise his head and look at her.

"Yes, really; and I cannot find out anything about the railway."

"I daresay you will hear about it soon;" and Lucyan, as he said it, chopped, in a rather aimless fashion, at a rhododendron root.

"Do you know anything about it?"

Lucyan met her steady eyes, and could answer nothing but "Yes."

"Has the line been changed then?"

"I believe it has been changed."

"It is to be the other line?"

"Yes, it is to be another line."

"The Bruszów line?"

"No," said Lucyan; "not the Bruszów line."

He was vainly striving at his habitual calmness. He had looked forward to this moment as to a moment of enjoyment — a moment of satisfied revenge. It would be so pleasant, he had thought, to ruin the woman who hated him; but it was not so pleasant to tell the woman that she was ruined. Somebody else should have told it her, not he. He wished for no such coarse-flavoured satisfaction. And yet he was obliged to look at her, and answer her: her steady gaze was not to be evaded. Now that the moment was come, the invincible Lucyan felt smaller than he had ever felt in his life before; and the irresistible conviction oppressed him that he *looked* smaller too,— smaller a great deal than the woman whom he had helped to ruin.

"*Not* the Bruszów line?" asked Vizia.

"No."

"But you know which line it is?"

"Yes," said Lucyan, "I do;" and he compelled himself to return her gaze, feeling at that moment as if he could almost have despised himself for not being able to do so quietly; for there was no small cowardice about him, however much of large villany. "The Belgian Company has decided to make the line of railway pass here."

"Here?" repeated Vizia, not quite understanding. "Do you mean here, through Wowasulka?"

"Yes, exactly"—Lucyan gave an uneasy laugh—"it is to pass by here,—the very spot we are standing on."

"I understand," said Vizia, after a short pause; "I understand everything now."

"These will have all to be cleared out of the way," explained Lucyan, speaking rather quickly,—"they are all going to be blasted;" and he struck the rock beside him with the spade he held. The details of the matter were pleasanter to dwell upon than the matter itself. The moment was an agreeable one to nobody, except perhaps Aitzig Majulik, who, creeping a little nearer in the heat of his interest, was gazing with all his eyes, and listening with all his ears.

"Through Wowasulka? Yes, I understand," said Vizia, quite calmly. "Then I am ruined." She did not falter or turn pale, for she felt a great deal quieter now than she had felt in the morning.

"*Gott und die Welt!*" murmured Aitzig Majulik, "they are telling her that she is ruined, and she does not weep; they are telling her that she has lost all her money, and she does not scream, nor tear out her hair, nor rend her garments. *Gott und die Welt!* but that woman is strong."

"I am ruined," she said again, without flinching, proclaiming her ruin almost as proudly as she might have proclaimed a triumph; for hers was one of those

natures which fear a danger only so long as it is uncertain, and dread only the enemy who is hidden.

"I advised you to sell the estate," remarked Lucyan, but not with his usual assurance.

Vizia gave him no answer but a look of cold contempt, and then there followed a painful pause between them.

Muttering something about looking for Xenia, Lucyan turned after that minute, and walked slowly away. It was like leaving her master of the field; but he could stand the contempt of her gaze no longer. He positively slank away among the rocks, a defeated rather than a victorious man. His ace of trumps which, peeping from the pack, had appeared to be such a brilliantly painted card, now that it was thrown on the table, had shrunk to a wretched scrap of daubed pasteboard.

"I am going now," said Vizia, looking round her with eyes that were a little dazed. "I am going home." She had made two steps down the path when some one was beside her. It was Kazimir, and he was looking at her with a mixture of pity and indignation on his face. During the last minutes he had stood a silent and puzzled spectator, not able to guess at more than half the truth, but suspecting that there was foul play somewhere. The only thing quite clear to him was Vizia's ruin; and Vizia, being ruined,

became, of course, of much greater interest in his eyes than Vizia in prosperity.

"Do not go yet," he said, as she stopped on the path. "Is this true, then? You are ruined?"

"Yes, it is quite true."

"And the railway would have helped you?"

"It would have saved me."

They were both as unguarded as though they had been alone. Neither of them was collected enough to remember that Aitzig Majulik, hovering among the rocks close at hand, could hear every word that they said.

"And can nothing save you now?"

"Nothing." She leant against the stone beside her, and for a moment she pressed her hand tightly across her eyes; for she felt strangely giddy just now, as the dying traveller feels in the desert when the vultures hover around him, hardly waiting to swoop till his last breath shall be drawn. After a minute she looked up again. "I wonder whether I can work," she said. "I could cut grass or draw water, I think, for I am very strong." She looked down at her hands. They were not hands to be compared to those frail morsels of loveliness which Xenia called her hands, but they were well-shaped and ivory-white.

"It cannot be so bad as that," broke out Kazimir, indignant against fate, and against Lucyan, and against

the arrangements of the world in general. "You cannot be without a home while there is your cousin's house."

"My cousin's house is your brother's," said Vizia. "Do you see that woman over there in that potato-field? What is she doing?"

"Digging up potatoes, I think."

"Well, I would rather dig up potatoes just like that all the year round, than take refuge in your brother's house."

It did not occur to either of them that potatoes are not to be dug up all the year round. Indeed Kazimir knew so very little about potatoes, that, even in a calmer moment, the idea would have failed to strike him as strange. He stood silent, in very shame that he could say no word in his brother's defence. He was forced so thoroughly to sympathise with the sentiments which made her scorn the idea of living in his brother's house. "A few years ago it was to have been my house," he said aloud, half musing. "Would you have refused its hospitality then?"

"I—I don't know," she said, with averted face. "Don't ask me."

This was more cruel than the cruelest thing he had yet said to her. In the face of this kindness she began to tremble for her dignity.

"You dislike taking help?"

"Yes; and if your brother offered it I should not take it."

"And if I offered it?"

"You?" She turned her head, and for a moment an angry answer burnt on her lips. The idea of taking help from him, perhaps money from him, was unbearable to her pride. But then she met his look, and she saw that he had said it in such perfect good faith, and with such perfect simplicity, that her pride could not fail to be disarmed. Against her will she began to soften and to melt. "From you?" she faltered,—"yes; from you I might have taken it."

"But I have nothing to give," said Kazimir, with rueful regret; "we are both in the same boat, are we not?" And then those two stood and looked at each other for a moment helplessly—those two neighbours that had been beggared in the same game of cards.

"Then is there nothing that I can do for you?" asked Kazimir, breaking the silence.

"No, nothing—nothing at all."

"Can I not take you home at least?"

"No, I had rather not. You can do nothing but leave me alone."

"But not now, this minute?"

"Yes, this minute. I—I would rather be left alone at once;" and Vizia put out her hand to motion him

away. She could bear this terrible kindness no longer. "If you wish to do me a favour, you will go."

He went away instantly, though he found her conduct inexplicable. He did not turn his head once, but he puzzled over the shortness of her manner, and he puzzled still more over the look that had been in her eyes when she said that from him she might have taken help. That look troubled him and made him wonder; but he was not able quite yet to fathom its meaning nor sound its depth. Nothing to give! Kazimir honestly believed that he had nothing to give. He did not know that he had something to give that would be more precious to Vizia than all the wide world would be.

Vizia turned and walked a few paces in the other direction, then, stopping abruptly, her courage seemed to break down; for she began to cry.

"That is not the railway, and not the ruin," said Aitzig Majulik to himself, as he cowered in the convenient cleft which the two twin rocks afforded him. "That woman's heart is broken."

The look in her eyes which had so puzzled Kazimir had not puzzled Aitzig Majulik at all. He was as good a judge of the symptoms of love as he was of the value of a left-off coat, and he was as well able to estimate its strength as he was capable of guessing at the probable number of feathers on a live duck's back,

and measuring their weight by his eye alone. Personal experience had not guided him here—for no orthodox Polish Jew has time to fall in love—but as an article of trade, the passion had come largely under his notice, and had proved quite as remunerative as rags or feathers.

"She did not cry," reflected Aitzig, "when they told her that she was ruined" (if she had cried Aitzig would have esteemed her more); "she did not weep over her money and her fields; and now she is crying because of a man's words; and he is a man who can make her neither rich nor poor, who cannot even lend her money? *Gott und die Welt!* but that woman is weak!" It was a pitiful spectacle to Aitzig Majulik, but it was a perfectly clear one. His judgment was not at fault for a moment. "That woman's heart is broken," he said; and issuing from his rocky hiding-place, he sat down on a flat stone-block, and proceeded to think out the matter. Every broken article which he had come across in his life had been made to yield to him some small percentage of gain. The question in his mind was now, how much could he make out of a broken heart?

He thought and thought, and knit his shaggy brows, and gnawed at his dirty fingers, and could reach no issue. For all his thinking, he was not able to arrive at any bargain to be immediately concluded. The

broken heart must be put aside for the present. At home, in Aitzig Majulik's dwelling, there was a dark and dingy closet, with several worm-eaten shelves. At the bottom of that closet there stood broken chairs, and wheels, and bird-cages, and on the shelves were ranged broken bottles and boxes, stringless violins, and battered candlesticks. They were none of them forgotten, but they were all standing there waiting each for its opportunity in life. It was into a closet very like this, if less tangible, that Aitzig for the present stowed away Vizia's broken heart.

CHAPTER XI.

PAY ONE TO THE KNAVE.

"I am not in the giving vein to-day."
—*King Richard III.*

LUCYAN had thrown away his old pocket-comb and bought a new one in its stead. It had been a faithful friend that old comb, and a close companion for years past. Many a brilliant idea had it combed into his head, and from many a puzzle and a worry had it combed him out. But now the ivory had turned yellow, and the stem was splitting. It had grown into a decrepit and toothless old servant whose serving-days are over. To use a thing so long as it can be used, getting all the good out of it that can be got, and then to throw it aside without a pang, belonged to the very essence of Lucyan's nature; and the old comb, which had grown yellow in his service, was cast ruthlessly on the dunghill, from whence Aitzig picked it out next day as a thing by no means to be despised. The new comb had severe work before it,

and therefore it was that Lucyan had chosen it extra large and strong, of smooth thick ivory, and with a case into which it neatly fitted. The stress of brain-work indeed was so heavy at present, and had been so heavy lately, that its weight had much accelerated the old servant's collapse.

And not to the servant only, but to the master far more, had the last few months been a strain and a trial. Throughout all the summer he had been working his way towards one end, and he had reached his object now, but it had been no easy matter. It had required thought, it had required tact, it had required some money, too, before he could attain the double object of revenging himself on Vizia and realising the large sum which the railway-ground would directly pay him. Above all, it had required Aitzig Majulik. He would most certainly have failed without Aitzig Majulik to guide his craft through the labyrinth of unclean channels which alone could land him on the desired shore. He had succeeded in his object perfectly. The neighbourhood was surprised by the announcement that the railway-line was to pass through Wowasulka; but the neighbourhood never dreamed that the Marszalek had played anything but a passive part in the matter. No suspicion of underhand intriguing and plotting was afloat. If the Marszalek had looked rather thin and careworn lately, there were

plenty of reasons for explaining that. The loss of his only child, the heiress to his fortune, would have amply explained it by itself.

The object was gained: the shore was reached, and yet Lucyan looked as careworn as before. During that passage over those muddy and somewhat perilous waters, he had been forced into a closer and more intimate contact with his repulsive steersman than ever before. The Jew's grotesque peculiarities were a constant trial to Lucyan's fastidious taste, and never had they been pressed upon his notice as now. The growing familiarity, the false humility, and the leering impertinence which it covered, had daily been becoming more odious as well as more distinct.

There was in every one of Aitzig's glances a sharp suspicion, ever on the watch; for Aitzig, knowing himself to be hated and feared by the master whom he had served too well, hated and feared that master in an equal degree: and reading that fear in the Jew's eyes under the shield of his abject humility, and through the midst of his half-hidden insolence, Lucyan's own fear caught fire again, and scorched him with its flames.

Indeed he was not himself in those days, or he would have had no difficulty in shaking off these morbid sensations. The strain had told upon him, and his nerves were shaken. It is only a robust

organisation which can bear such a strain without feeling it, and Lucyan's organisation belonged to the delicate order rather than to the robust. Precisely those nerves which are the most keen and sensitive, are the most easily unstrung when once they have reached the limits of their endurance. Lucyan tried stimulants and tried exercise without having succeeded in regaining the tone of his constitution. His sleep became broken and his days restless, while his appetite began to forsake him entirely. So much had he got to hate the sight of Aitzig, that he had fallen into the habit of listening with a sort of nervous apprehension for the sound of the factor's step. The very smell of garlic had grown loathsome to him beyond power of expression. Aitzig was the one obstacle in his path which he had not been able to tread down, which he dared not tread down for fear of tripping over it and breaking his neck.

But there was another reason now, and a mighty one for him, which made him fear the sound of Aitzig's step. Whenever Aitzig entered the house now, whether it were morning or evening, in rain or in sunshine, it was always to press on one point that he came.

The Belgian Company had agreed to pay down to Lucyan thirty thousand florins for the railway-ground and station-house which was to stand within the

Wowasulka estate. It was a high sum; but it had been Aitzig Majulik's interest to have the ground taxed high, and he had succeeded in having it over-taxed. The money had been paid down, as arranged, in the most above-board and business-like fashion possible; and the moment when the crisp bank-notes were handed to him by the plenipotentiary of the Frères Longuebourse, was to Lucyan, in the midst of his worries, a moment of the most exquisite enjoyment—perhaps, on the whole, the happiest moment in his life. The sight and sound of money had always had a strong influence upon him; and it was an influence which had grown incalculably stronger with years; for gold is like a poisoned water, which never abates a man's thirst, but makes him thirstier the more he drinks of it.

The bank-notes were clean and crisp, and Lucyan, when he was alone again, gazed at them in a sort of rapture. But then there arose the dreadful thought: "It is not all mine; the fifth part has been promised to Aitzig Majulik." The fifth part of thirty thousand is six thousand. Six thousand whole florins! Was it a wonder if he hated the Jew? Was it a wonder if, now that the object was gained, he almost succeeded in persuading himself that he could have gained it without Aitzig's help? Was it a wonder if he put off the evil moment from day to day and from week to

week? It would have to come some day, he knew, but with all his power he would drag out the time. It would be such a wrench to separate those brotherly bank-notes; it would be such a pity to break into the round sum of thirty. Twenty-four thousand sounded so much less complete; there was not the same satisfactory neatness about it. And yet the evil day would come. Aitzig, if driven to extremes, had ways and means at his command. Fortunately, thought Lucyan, the term for the Propinacya lease was over. It was perhaps not likely, for many reasons, that Aitzig would have dared to refuse payment; but yet it was as well that the term should be over. Perhaps also there hovered on Lucyan's mind a vague, indistinct, and unformed hope. Aitzig was an old man—a man not many years short of seventy; how, if it were decreed that he should be gathered presently to his forefathers? The thirty thousand need not be separated then.

These thoughts, and such as these, were in Lucyan's mind, as he sat at his writing-table, passing his bank-notes in review. He had done so dozens of times before, but it was a charm which ever grew; they looked so well-packed and so full of meaning in their business-like packets of a hundred florins each; each florin stared at him so expressively as he handled it. But he was not half through his review, when he

paused in the counting, and raised his head to listen. There was a step outside—a shambling, shuffling step. That was the step he dreaded. Aitzig Majulik was coming again to press him for the money. He must brace himself anew for one of those scenes which had begun to weary and disgust him, and to which he yet could not quite resolve himself to put a stop.

Quickly he swept the bank-notes aside and locked them away out of sight. Lucyan knew better than to let the Jew's eyes rest on the notes exposed; judging from himself, he was certain that their direct influence must be fatal.

Aitzig, creeping in at the door, did not find Lucyan at the writing-table; he found him pacing the floor with a studiously slow step, passing the comb, the new ivory comb, through his hair.

"What have you come for, Aitzig?" asked Lucyan, standing still.

Aitzig, closing the door and stealing forward, gave a hideous giggle. "The noble Pan knows what I have come for, but it pleases the noble Pan to pretend that he does not know."

"What do you want?"

"If it gives any amusement to the gracious gentleman to pretend that he does not know," said Aitzig, deaf to the question, "the gracious gentleman can of course do so. Who is Aitzig, that he should object?"

"What do you want?" said Lucyan again.

"I want the money," replied the Jew.

He came to a standstill beside the door,—for his lifelong habit was still strong upon him. Over his arm there hung something black and long, that was folded together for greater convenience, and from between the folds of which a silver stripe peeped out here and there to catch the light.

"Have I not forbidden you to come to the house?" said Lucyan, sternly. "People are beginning to notice your constant presence, and to remark upon it."

"Oh yes," sniggered Aitzig, "the noble Pan has forbidden poor Aitzig to come to the house."

"Well, and are my commands not to be obeyed?"

"No doubt, no doubt; but Aitzig, being on his way to the synagogue, could see no harm in coming in here as he passed, just as he was, with his *Tales* over his arm." Aitzig, as he spoke, gently patted the brand-new shroud,—for it was his shroud he carried with him.

"When you have anything to say to me," went on Lucyan, quickly, "you should wait outside to say it,—at the end of the garden, or in the forest—that is, out of sight of the windows," he added to himself.

"The noble Pan knows that I have something to say to him."

"But I have no time to hear it now,—I am in a

great hurry, Aitzig; I have been called to Lwów for a meeting; in less than an hour I must start. I will hear you another day, Aitzig."

"And another day the noble Pan will be weary from his journey; and the day after that I will come, and find the house empty, because the noble Pan is gone to his fields; and thus the time passes, and Aitzig gets not his money."

"You will get it in time," said Lucyan.

"Of course I shall get it in time," answered Aitzig, sharply, for a moment dropping his abject tone, while at the bare suggestion of not getting his money, his sunken eyes gleamed as bright as hot coals. "Of course I shall get my money."

"Yes, yes," said Lucyan, shuddering a little at that look of Aitzig's. "Yes, yes,—of course."

But the gleam in Aitzig's eyes was only momentary; in the next minute he had sunk back already into his cowering attitude, and resumed his nasal whine.

"The noble Pan is not going to be hard upon poor old Aitzig, who has served him so faithfully and so well,—who has obeyed his commands, and followed at his heels like a dog."

"I have told you that you shall have your money."

"Who but Aitzig," went on the factor, "could have done this thing? How Aitzig has worked, and spoken, and pressed to get this thing done! And now the

thing is done, and the railway comes here, and the men are busy already with the ground over there by the forest,—the noble Pan can see them if he walks into the garden; and Aitzig, who looks upon it, and says, 'This is my work,'—is Aitzig to linger and wait for his payment?"

"Enough, enough, Aitzig," said Lucyan, irritably; "I have no time for this to-day,—I am in a hurry. I have not got the money at hand just now."

"The noble Pan loves to say that he has not the money at hand, and he has but to stretch out his hand and reach it; and the noble Pan has plenty of money more,—more money than the people can guess. Hi, hi! He has been so clever, the gracious gentleman, that all others have been as fools beside him; but not Aitzig Majulik,—oh no, not Aitzig Majulik; hi, hi!"

"Hold your infernal chatter, dog, in God's name!" said Lucyan, between his teeth.

"Aitzig is a dog?" whimpered the Jew; "poor old Aitzig is a dog, to be kicked and trodden. Thus does the noble Pan use his faithful servants. He turned off Naftali Taubenkübel, to starve in his old age, and would he not like to turn off Aitzig Majulik?"

"Yes, if he dared," thought Lucyan to himself; but he made no answer to the Jew.

"His brother," chattered on Aitzig, "the gracious Pan Kapitan,—he would not serve his servants in that

manner; for he is a great gentleman, an honourable gentleman, the Pan Kazimir. If the Pan Kazimir were master of Wowasulka, then——"

"Then? What do you mean by then?" questioned Lucyan, quickly, turning rather pale as he spoke; for the idea thus betrayed struck him with vague alarm. "If you are not satisfied with your master, why do you not go and look for another?" The words were mere hollow mockery. They both knew well enough why Aitzig could not go and look for another master. It had long been clear to both that for Aitzig there could be no other master than Lucyan, and for Lucyan no other servant than Aitzig.

"Mean?" echoed the Jew, wriggling a few steps nearer. "Aitzig means no harm; he makes no reproaches; he wants but his money; he asks but for that,—the money which is his—the fifth portion of the profit."

"Hush, in heaven's name,—hush!" said Lucyan; "not so loud. You need not yell out our transaction, so that the whole house should hear it."

He was not yelling,—he was whispering; but to Lucyan's overstrained nerves it appeared as though all the ears of the neighbourhood must be reached by that hoarse whisper.

"The fifth portion of the profit," repeated Aitzig, in a lower, hoarser whisper. "The noble Pan has not

forgotten our terms? Ah, no! I see that the noble Pan remembers well. When shall I have the money?"

"When I have time to attend to the matter."

"If the noble Pan would name a day—if he would say to me, 'Aitzig, your money shall be paid to you on Monday, or on Wednesday, or within the week——'"

"I cannot possibly name a day exactly. I shall be away at Lwów for several days now."

"Shall it be Tuesday?" suggested the Jew, with an insinuating smirk.

"No, it cannot be."

"Wednesday?" pressed Aitzig, in a yet softer voice.

"I shall be busy on Wednesday."

"Within the week? before the end of next week?"

"I have bound myself to no time," answered Lucyan, writhing to escape. "You shall have it whenever it is convenient, and it is not convenient to-day. I must have peace to-day, do you hear?"

"Peace!" said Aitzig, reflectively. "Yes, I hear."

He stood silent for a minute, with his eyes so completely in shadow that their expression was not to be read. Lucyan, taking up his hat, and blowing some dust from his coat-sleeve, was striving to appear as if he had forgotten Aitzig's presence, but not succeeding so well as he might have wished.

"If," began Aitzig, after that pause, "if the noble Pan desires peace, he can have it easily."

"How?" asked Lucyan, with a sigh of sheer fatigue.

"He has only to give to poor Aitzig a piece of paper—a little piece of paper—which says that he owes him the six thousand florins."

"A voucher?" repeated Lucyan, suspiciously.

"Yes, they call it so; only a little piece of paper. And when Aitzig has that paper, the gracious Pan shall have peace. Aitzig will press him no more. The gracious Pan shall have peace for a month, a whole month, after Aitzig gets that paper;" and in the breathless eagerness of his speech, Aitzig went off into a fit of coughing which shook his lean frame from head to foot.

Lucyan, pausing in the brushing of his coat-sleeve, stood and listened to the insinuating words. Peace! Peace was the very thing he wanted just now; peace and respite from the dreaded moment. Would it not be worth buying at the price of that scrap of paper? It was a thought to be considered at least; and in order to consider it the more easily, Lucyan mechanically drew out his comb-case and opened it. The case was empty, the comb had never been put back there; it must have slipped out of his hand in the beginning of the interview (for the new ivory was still as polished as glass), and he had never noticed it. He cast his eyes about him hastily with a feeling of

uneasiness, a sensation of something awanting, something positively incomplete about himself; for such a thing as to have dropped his comb unnoticed had never before happened to him. This trifling incident disconcerted him almost more than anything he had ever experienced. He seemed to have lost his bearings and his cue as he looked about in vain for the comb. And all the time Aitzig was pouring out a gentle stream of arguments, soothing, tempting, and dazzling; they entered Lucyan's soul by his ears, and crowded upon him more and more, until the temptation of ridding himself of Aitzig's presence, and of thinking that he had rid himself of it for a whole long month, became too urgent to be resisted. He would need no longer then to listen nervously for that hateful step in the passage, which had grown to haunt him even in his dreams.

Scarcely aware of it, he was walking towards the writing-table already. He sat down slowly in front of it, and drew out a sheet of paper. He had not exactly resolved to do this thing as yet, and he was not able at this moment to analyse the matter calmly; but he was strangely tempted by the idea of immediate peace, and mechanically he smoothed out the sheet, and tried the point of his pen.

"Well?" he said, turning his head towards Aitzig.

Aitzig, leaving his place by the door, stole forward

towards the table. He came along cautiously on tip-toe, with his eyes cast about him, almost as if he expected a trap laid in the carpet; and Lucyan saw him come with that same suspicious look, almost as though he suspected a dagger under the *kaftan.*

Aitzig suggested the words, dictated them almost, and Lucyan wrote, without once protesting, as though under a spell.

It was drawing near to the hour of the synagogue; and as he dictated, Aitzig took the shroud from his arm, and hastily shook out its folds.

"Yes, noble Pan, that is the way, that is the way," he murmured, throwing the black garment about his shoulders in order to save time; and as he followed the strokes of the signature, he hugged himself in his shroud.

So entirely had Lucyan's faculties been wrapped in the paper before him, that he had never noticed Aitzig's manipulations. Looking up now from the last letter of his name, he started at the sight before him.

There stood the gabbling Jew, with his claw-like hand stretched out for the paper—his eyes burning in a fever of impatience for the moment that he should clutch it—and his death-cloak hanging around him. It muffled him in its blue-black folds; the silver stripes set off the shrivelled skin, the hooked nose,

the corkscrew curls, with a ghastly grotesqueness of frame.

It was an ugly sight, and yet, strange to say, nothing beautiful that he had ever seen in his life had appeared to Lucyan so entrancing as this picture of Aitzig in his shroud. It seemed to show him all at once and distinctly what was the thing he wanted. If only he could see Aitzig thus—see him wrapped for good and all in his shroud—how easy would everything be then! No more danger then; no more dread. Those thirty thousand florins in the drawer need not be parted. Who could trace, then, the step by which he had climbed to his present height? The ghost of the past would then indeed be laid.

With a sort of fascination he sat and gazed at Aitzig, and as he gazed, Aitzig broke into a second fit of coughing more violent than the first. Yes, he was an old man, to be sure. It would not be strange if some day—some not very distant day—he were to break down.

The sight of Aitzig coughing in his shroud appeared only to have enhanced the impression made by Aitzig simply standing there in his shroud. The factor could not imagine what reason induced Lucyan to sit and gaze at him with a look so fascinated, almost so admiring. If he had looked at his beautiful young wife like that it might have been comprehensible; but an

old Jew in a shroud! Aitzig did not understand it. He stood there coughing and wondering, but never withdrawing the outstretched hand which waited for the paper, even though his whole arm shook from the violence of the paroxysm.

Lucyan looked from the yellow hand up to the watchful eyes, and hesitated. He looked again, and the paper which he was holding out already, was unexpectedly withdrawn. Perhaps something too expressive in the clutch of that hand had frightened him. Should he give it, or should he not? He was not enough master of himself to answer the question coolly; but he retained just enough self-command to check himself on the very verge of an act of rashness.

"No, Aitzig," he said, leaning back; "not to-day. Come back on Wednesday, and you shall have the paper. I must sleep a night over this,"—he passed his hand over his damp brow—"and," he added to himself, "I must find my comb first."

Had it not been so very near to the hour of the synagogue, the battle might have begun anew. But Aitzig had run himself too close already; and Lucyan's carriage was at the door.

The paper, written and signed as it was, was pushed back into the desk; and Aitzig's eyes followed it till it disappeared, and remained on the spot where it had vanished. It was a comfort to him at least to know

that the paper was lying there with the full signature to it. Partial though the victory was, he must be content for to-day. He saw the paper put into the desk—he saw the desk-lid closed—he marked how the Marszalek's hand shook in the action—and he marked another small circumstance besides, which took deep root in his memory; and it was just then that the carriage came to the door for Lucyan.

In another five minutes the carriage was bearing Lucyan away; and Aitzig was hurrying along the road towards Tarajow.

But in the empty room, where the evening shadows were falling now, a spiteful imp was laughing to itself. The lost comb lay under the writing-table; and as it peeped out cautiously from its concealment, its white teeth seemed to gleam through the shade in a grin of diabolical glee.

CHAPTER XII.

QUEEN AND KNAVE.

"Denn was man schwarz auf weiss besitzt
Kann man getrost nach Hause tragen."
—GOETHE.

XENIA had found an old wooden lamb, with half the paint sucked off; and the sight of that lamb made her sit down where she had found it in a corner of the empty nursery, and begin to cry. Her thoughts had not been much with her dead Wandusia lately. She had shed many tears at first, and immediately after her bereavement had written a most touching letter to a friend at Krakow, in which she described herself as sitting between a cradle and an open grave; but of late her thoughts had been very busy with something else—something which she did not quite understand herself. When, however, she met anything that reminded her of Wandusia, she always sat down and cried for a few minutes at a time. Nothing had so vividly reminded her of Wandusia for long as this

sucked wooden lamb; and therefore she cried for several more minutes than usual.

"I remember so well bringing it back from Lwów for her, and she was so pleased with it, poor darling; and I had on my new mauve dress that day, with shaded ribbons in my hair."

The wooden lamb looked at her so reproachfully that Xenia felt an impulse to do something unusual. She therefore went out into the garden and gathered a great bunch of blue asters (she knew that Lucyan did not like her meddling with the few remaining roses), and with the flowers in her hand she started for the churchyard near Tarajow. When she looked back upon this day in after-years, it was always with a certain surprise and unqualified admiration of her own courage. She was not used to taking walks alone; or, for the matter of that, to taking walks at all. This walk to the churchyard was decidedly the most courageous act of her life. Had the influence of the wooden lamb not been so strong upon her, she never would have been capable of anything as rash, not to say reckless (regarded from a Polish point of view), as to walk without protection for half an hour along a country-road. If Lucyan had been at home she would not have dared to do this; for Lucyan objected to her fatiguing herself thus; and he particularly objected to any visits to the churchyard, as the

unavoidable result was red eyes. But Lucyan was away at Lwów still, and would not be back till the next day.

Early in the afternoon, Xenia started with her bunch of asters in her hand; and about an hour and a half later, she returned with only a few blue flowers remaining, which she had stuck into her waistband, for the colour happened to harmonise with the dress.

But she was not thinking of the asters now, nor of her dress, nor either of Wandusia's grave. She reached the house almost running; and breathless and scared she sank into a chair, and closed her eyes to recover herself.

Never again, in all her life, she vowed with her returning breath, would she take a country-walk alone. Her first experience of the kind would certainly be her last. All her ardour of two hours ago was quenched beyond revival, and the wooden lamb was superseded by quite another image now; for she had had a fright on the way back, and she was still trembling at the mere thought of it, and shedding hysterical tears.

When the hysterical stage was passed, there followed a violent desire to confide her adventure to somebody. She was as little able as a child of keeping her troubles to herself, and quite as little able as a child of bearing them alone. But no possible confidant was at hand; Lucyan was away, aunt Robertine was

out, Vizia had not been near the house for weeks. Surely aunt Robertine must be returning soon! Xenia did not venture to go out into the garden, for fear of seeing again that terrifying figure which had so scared her on the road, but she went to the door and peeped out impatiently. When she had looked out three or four times she grew frightened again, for she saw some one coming through the garden; but in the next moment her fears vanished. It was only Aitzig Majulik, whom she had grown so used to seeing that his presence appeared quite natural at any hour of the day.

"Is the gracious Pan returned from Lwów?" inquired Aitzig, as he approached the door.

"No, he is not back yet," said Xenia.

Aitzig silently rocked his head, in what was meant to look like dumb despair, just as if he had not before known what the answer would be.

"But perhaps the gracious Pan has left directions with the gracious Pani," asked Aitzig, cautiously. "Did he not make a note of something that was to be given to Aitzig Majulik?"

"No, he left me no directions at all; he never does."

Aitzig rocked his head more violently than before, and began softly to wring his hands and gently to utter groans.

"Is there anything the matter?" asked Xenia,

rather startled. It was always disagreeable to her to see any one suffering; and Aitzig looked at this moment as though he were in a fit of the most acute pain. She had left the doorway by this time, and had returned into the drawing-room, where Aitzig followed her.

"Yes, there is much that is the matter," began Aitzig, as noiselessly he closed the door, speaking in a mournful, dreary tone, like the minor chord of a barrel-organ—very much out of tune,—"there is much that is the matter. Times are bad, and poor old Aitzig has got to toil from morning to night to supply his wants, and the roads are dusty, gracious Pani, and hard to tread."

"But I cannot help you," answered Xenia, somewhat overwhelmed by this panorama of misery unrolled before her eyes.

Aitzig had a notion that she *could* help him, but the opportunity was not quite ripe yet, so he went on in the same minor key.

"And to-day I come to ask for the thing that has been promised me, and the noble Pan is not returned, and I have to go disappointed home."

"What has been promised you?" asked Xenia.

"Only a little bit of paper."

"A bit of paper?"

"Yes, a paper,—a business-paper,—that is all."

"But I know nothing at all about business," said Xenia, honestly.

"Ah no! why should a beautiful lady like you know anything of business?" sighed Aitzig. Of course she knew nothing of business; and just because he knew that she knew nothing of business was the conviction steadily growing upon him that she had the power to help him. "What was the paper about, did the gracious lady ask?" said Aitzig, drawing out his words, so as to gain time for thought. "What else should it be but about the Propinacya which gives so much work to poor Aitzig?"

The Propinacya, he had rapidly concluded, was the safest stalking-horse to choose.

"Oh, about the Propinacya!" repeated Xenia, turning rather pale again; for the Propinacya had played a prominent part in her fright of this afternoon. "It was about the Propinacya that that dreadful old man spoke to me to-day; oh, he frightened me so!" and she sat down and began deliberately to tremble.

"An old man?" asked Aitzig, curiously. "What old man has dared to frighten the gracious lady?"

Xenia looked at the factor and hesitated. He was very dirty and very ragged, and he was a Jew, but at the same time he was a human being with ears to listen to her story, and a tongue to answer her,

even if not a soul to sympathise; and after a very little more fencing, she began to pour out her adventure.

She had been on her way back from the churchyard, where she had put the asters on Wandusia's grave (save those kept for her belt), when all at once upon the road she had been stopped by an old man, an old Jew in tatters, and bent upon a stick. "Are you the lady of Wowasulka?" he had asked her; and when she said "yes," he had stood in front of her for a minute, looking at her slowly all over, from the crown of her hat down to the heels of her boots. He was murmuring something into his beard which she could not understand; but when his eye reached the line of gold bracelet on her wrist, the murmur had burst out into loud words. "She can wear gold!" he had screamed in a transport of fury—"gold upon her hands, and gold on her neck, and gold in her ears! But it is bad gold, bad gold; the lady of Wowasulka carries ill-gotten goods along with her. Go home, fair lady; and if they ask who stopped you on the road, say: Naftali Taubenkübel, who served the Bielinskis for thirty years, and was turned off at last like a horse that is too old to chew the grass; who held the Propinacya once, and prospered, but who sank down slowly, slowly, slowly, from the day that it was taken from him. Say that his children are dead, and his

grandchildren starving, and say that his curse shall follow you beyond your grave."

All this Xenia repeated to Aitzig in a more or less comprehensible form, and Aitzig, listening intently, sagaciously nodded his head, and looked impressively wise. There was nothing especially startling to him in the occurrence itself, but he was considering whether the effect it had produced could not be employed so as to assist his plans.

"Do you not think the poor man must have been mad?" asked Xenia. "It is so dreadful to think that his grandchildren are starving; but can you not tell him that he must not frighten me like that again?"

"I shall see, I shall see," said Aitzig slowly, racking his brain for some plausible pretext. "Now, if the Pan had been at home, and I could have had the paper——"

"Has the paper got anything to do with Naftali Taubenkübel?" asked Xenia, with a new interest.

"He held the Propinacya once," ventured Aitzig, cautiously.

"Ah, the Propinacya; yes, I understand." She did not understand at all, or rather she completely misunderstood; but she knew that Naftali had once held the Propinacya, and that Aitzig now held it; and Aitzig had told her that the paper he wanted had something to do with the Propinacya. She did not

attempt to enter into the matter, but in some indefinite way she connected the ideas, and thought that she understood. Aitzig's words had gained a plausible support now.

"If the gracious Pani understands," suggested Aitzig, "then will she not let Aitzig have the paper he wants?"

"But I know nothing about it; I don't know where it is."

"*I* know where it is," retorted Aitzig, betrayed for one moment into open eagerness. "It lies in the next room, just under the lid of the desk."

"But the desk is locked," said Xenia, "and I have not got the keys."

"True, true; but the gracious Pan might have taken out the paper again and laid it outside; if the noble lady would only go into the next room, and only cast a glance about."

Aitzig's next move was undoubtedly to get into the same room with the paper. Remembering a certain small circumstance which he had noted the other day, he made this move with a hopefully beating heart.

Xenia, half willing, half unwilling, led the way into Lucyan's writing-room; and scarcely had Aitzig crept in behind her, when he experienced a violent inclination to clap his hands, and kick up his slippered heels for joy, for his first glance towards the desk had

shown him that he was right. An expressive gape of the lid met his eye; it had never been properly closed. Oh joy and wonder! Not even a lock, only a woman between him and the thing he wanted. Might his name be no longer Aitzig Majulik if he did not prove himself able to gain his object now.

"Why, the desk is open," said Xenia, going up to it, but stopping a pace off, and looking at it rather shyly. She so very seldom entered her husband's private room, that she was scarcely familiar with its objects; and Lucyan's desk inspired her with a kind of awe.

"Of course the desk is open," argued Aitzig; "the noble gentleman has left it open on purpose, so that the noble lady should give my paper."

"But he told me nothing about it," said Xenia, still reluctant.

"*Gott und die Welt!* but that is strange, that he should have said nothing of it!" cried Aitzig, throwing up his hands. "The noble gentleman must have forgotten in the hurry; but the paper is there, waiting for me—I know it is. Lift but the lid a little, ever so little, and you will see the paper that lies waiting for Aitzig Majulik. Oh, there now! does the gracious lady believe Aitzig's words now?" for Xenia had carefully lifted the lid a little way and caught sight of the folded sheet beneath. Aitzig had caught sight

of it too, and in this moment he would have liked best to snatch up the paper and make off with it through the door. That course would scarcely be safe, however, and he stood in a fever of expectancy, watching Xenia, as she slowly pulled out the sheet, and held it still folded in her hand.

"Open it, gracious Pani," said Aitzig, drawing a little nearer in his eagerness, "and you will see the name of Aitzig Majulik upon it." Peering thus over her shoulder, with his face not a quarter of a yard from hers, Aitzig looked like some wizened sorcerer; and Xenia, with this foil to her beauty, appeared like the fairy-princess, around whom the sorcerer is weaving his enchantments.

She opened the paper, and saw the name of Aitzig Majulik, and saw Lucyan's signature at the bottom. The blinds had not been drawn up in this room today, so the paper was not easy to read at a glance; she saw something about a sum of money, but whether the sum were sixty, or six hundred, or six thousand florins, she did not think of investigating.

"It is most gracious of the noble lady to give to Aitzig the paper," began Aitzig, thinking it best policy to thank in advance for the favour which he had not yet received.

"But I do not know whether Lucyan meant me to give it to you," said Xenia, doubtfully.

"It is but a piece of paper, a little piece of paper," said Aitzig, in an accent of infantine innocence. "If Aitzig asked for money, then would it be wise to hesitate; but he asks only for a little piece of paper."

"And you say that it is for the Propinacya that you need it?" she questioned, still doubtfully.

"For the Propinacya, yes, assuredly."

"And that old man I saw, Naftali Taubenkübel, is it for him that you must have the paper?"

"Assuredly, assuredly," answered Aitzig, with brazen untruth. As long as he got the paper into his hands, it did not matter what pretext he used.

"Surely it would be right to give him the paper," thought Xenia, as she stood hesitating. "It must be right, as his name was on it." She was not accustomed to do anything by her own choice, but always that which others told her, even if the other were only a Jew. On the whole, she felt half proud of her present position. Lucyan had told her so often that she understood nothing of business; he had scolded her for having been awkward in getting those letters from Kazimir, and now she had a notion that she was going to vindicate her intelligence by proving herself capable of giving a paper to a Jew. She was on the point of yielding, when once more the thought of such a distinct act made her take fright.

"Cannot Naftali Taubenkübel wait till Lucyan is back?" she protested.

"*Gott und die Welt!*" cried Aitzig, desperate at her hesitation, and aiming a bold stroke at a spot which he had already marked as weak; "are not his grandchildren starving? did he not tell the gracious Pani so himself?" The grandchildren turned the scale, for Xenia could not bear to think of any one as starving; and the image of the old Jew, and the sound of his curses were still so vivid, that she trembled at the recollection. She did not in the least see how the grandchildren were going to be benefited by the paper; but yet the paper in another moment had passed from the white to the shrivelled yellow hand, and Aitzig, restraining a strong inclination to skip from the room, was, with trembling fingers, buttoning it safe up into the breast of his *kaftan*.

CHAPTER XIII.

BETWEEN PARTNERS.

"Non sum qualis eram."
—HORACE.

IT was with a sense of relief and respite that Lucyan stepped into his carriage as he started from home. For some days, at least, all worries were to be left behind him. In a few years' time, he reflected with satisfaction, it would be a first-class *coupé* into which he could step almost at his own door; and whereas it now took him a day to reach the capital, it would take him but a few hours then. Let Xenia complain of headaches as much as she liked, the inconvenience of having the rocks blasted so near to the house was well worth bearing patiently for the sake of the result in view.

These thoughts were exhilarating; and Lucyan had not been long gone from home, when his mind began to settle down into something like its normal quiet. He set to considering the last scene with Aitzig Maju-

lik. On the whole he was glad that he had withheld the paper. It was wiser not to have committed himself rashly. When he had slept a night over it, he would be able to see clearer, no doubt.

Lucyan slept a night over it; and next morning he did see more clearly. "What would have been the immediate result of that paper passing into Aitzig's hands?" he reflected dispassionately.

For Lucyan himself it would have been peace from persecution; and for Aitzig? For Aitzig it would have been a certitude of payment. That paper once in his hands, Aitzig could be sure of getting his money under all contingencies. "Yes, he would be sure of it," thought Lucyan; "whatever else might happen—however much I might delay—he would be sure of it, whether I were alive or dead."

"Whether I were dead!" The thought struck upon him disagreeably. Aitzig would not be likely to bewail his death; and something in the train of reflection led him back to some words which Aitzig had said yesterday when he had spoken of Kazimir as the possible master of Wowasulka. They had jarred upon him then, and they came back upon him now. With double force they came back; they disturbed and oppressed him; and the look which Aitzig had worn came back to him too. The more he dwelt on the recollection—and he dwelt on it with all the morbid

persistency of overstrained nerves—the more sinister a meaning did that tone and look appear to assume. And at last it flashed across his mind, "Why, Aitzig would not only be as sure, he would be much surer of his money, were I dead instead of alive!"

Now did he thank his stars for having guided him to withhold the paper. It is always a mistake when one man makes his death the object of another man's interest. A sort of panic came over him at the thought of what he had so nearly done. If it had not been for losing that stupid comb, he reflected, and with it his presence of mind, he never could have come so near to doing it. It was true what Aitzig had said: he had been so clever that all other men had been as fools beside him; and now, for all his cleverness, he had barely saved himself on the verge of the veriest schoolboy mistake. Like a man who has ridden hard all his life, and ends by breaking his neck over a cart-rut, so had Lucyan conquered all dangers, to blunder at last in the simplest of things—a mere scrap of paper. He had caught himself on the edge of a precipice, and though he was saved from the fall into the abyss, he felt rather giddy, merely from having looked down.

The terror of what he had so nearly done, and the relief of not having done it, engendered in Lucyan a sensation akin to intoxication. He walked the streets of the capital in a mood so buoyant that he scarcely

recognised himself. He felt better than he had done for weeks,—he felt as if he had drunk champagne; he felt almost as if he could have uttered a prayer of thanksgiving for the self-confidence, in which he had begun to doubt, being once more restored to him. Never before had he so believed in the guidance of his good star as he believed in it now.

This buoyancy remained with him as he travelled homewards: it was unabated still as he reached Wowasulka, late in the evening. The Pani had retired to bed: the supper had been kept for the Pan; it was on the table. Lucyan was glad to hear it,—glad that the Pani was in bed, for her talk would only have wearied him,—and glad that the supper was on the table, for he felt quite abnormally hungry. The supper was done justice to. "I have eaten well," said Lucyan, as he rose from the table, feeling rather surprised at himself; "and I feel as if I could sleep well to-night,—the first real sleep for a month at least: I should sleep all the better if I laid that paper under my pillow, as the children do with their toys. Supposing I lay it there?" and still smiling in a sort of amused wonder at himself, and at his own childishness, Lucyan took up the solitary lamp, and carried it into the next room. He was eager to handle again that trump-card with which he had so nearly been parting in foolish haste.

The next room was his writing-room—his own private apartment, sacred to himself,—the sanctuary of his secrets, of his cares, and of his triumphs. There was nothing to show that the sanctuary had been violated. The place had been tidied and dusted; the pencils had been freshly cut: upon the desk the penholders were ranged with an almost military precision, presenting their inky bayonets with perfect regularity; and beside them there lay a little object, white and long—the ivory comb, which had come to light in the dusting of the room. This was all exactly as it should be,—exactly as Lucyan had always found his room after every absence from home. He caressingly passed his hand down the slope of the oaken lid, thinking how well that desk had kept his secrets for him. Faithful and discreet old friend! stout, unassailable, and silent—— How was that? The lamp which Lucyan held rattled loudly in his hand: he had started in that moment—a start of surprise and terror. His fingers had reached the lower end of the lid, when, at that moment, he felt it yield to his touch. There was no resistance to meet an intruding hand,—the desk was unlocked. At first he refused to believe it. He preferred to doubt the sight which his eyes saw, and the sensation which his fingers experienced, to admitting the possibility that he should have left his desk unlocked. This—this alone—was not as it should be.

This was, as for all the world it should not have been. A second time he tried the lid, opening it no more than an inch; then he began slowly to believe,—to believe, that is to say, that it was open—not that he had left it open. Carefully placing the lamp on the table, he sat down, and attempted to think out the situation. With a great effort he forced his mind back to the circumstances of his departure. The talk with Aitzig was quite distinct; the sight of Aitzig in his shroud was very clear; so was the writing of the paper,—but then he was checked by a blank. When he attempted to picture the moment of turning the key, his memory refused the image. He could remember having locked the desk innumerable times; he could remember the details of many such lockings; but this particular time he could not reach by any effort of mind. The key was in his pocket; but it could afford him no clue. If he had forgotten to turn it in the lock, thought Lucyan, then his clearness of mind was beginning to go. He put his hand to his forehead, and wondered to feel it so cold and damp. He had been even nearer to the brink of the abyss than he had thought himself; and once more that terrible giddiness of brain seized upon him. As he leant forward to open the desk, the walls seemed tottering towards him on either side, and the floor to be sinking from under his feet.

The desk was scarcely open yet when he knew that the paper was gone. There were a hundred nooks and drawers where it might have lain; but in the moment that he flung up the lid and looked within, Lucyan understood at once that he had been robbed. Whatever else had grown dim, the exact position which that sheet had occupied had remained perfectly clear. The emptiness at which he stared had more meaning to him than any fulness he had ever seen; this blank was more tangible, this absence was more positive, than any presence had ever been.

"Robbery!" he muttered, and stealthily glanced around him. No trace of robbery met his eye. The room was undisturbed, absolute order reigned. He examined the lock, and found that it had not been forced. The thirty thousand florins lay untouched where he had left them. By this time his hands were shaking with excitement, like the hands of an old man in palsy. He lifted them to his head, and, rising from the chair, stood clutching his temples rigidly. The necessity of thinking and the impossibility of thinking clearly just now overwhelmed him. "To-morrow," he said aloud, struggling in the terrible confusion of thought—"to-morrow, when I have slept;" but in the same moment he seemed to see his sleepless night before him as distinct as a reality. He took a turn in the room to calm himself. "If my steadiness fails

me," he reflected, "I am lost. This will not do; I must sleep. There must be draughts in the apothecary's at Tarajow which will make me sleep. It is too late for to-day; but to-morrow—to-morrow——." Mechanically he took up the lamp, and guided himself carefully from the room. "To-morrow, to-morrow," he was still muttering as he entered the bedroom, walking like a drunken man.

The light flashed across Xenia's face as she lay in bed, and awoke her. Very slowly she turned on her pillow, and her blue eyes, dim with sleep, wandered towards the entering figure. That mutter of "to-morrow" had broken in upon her dream, and she was still half dreaming as she drowsily watched Lucyan coming in.

"To-morrow? What is there to-morrow?" she said, sleepily; and then, as Lucyan turned at the sound of her voice, the sleepy look left her eyes.

"Are you ill, Lucyan?" she asked, abruptly; "you are so pale. Has anything happened?"

"I have been robbed," said Lucyan, sullenly.

"Robbed?" Xenia started to a sitting posture, wide awake in a moment, while one heavy brown plait fell over the front of the embroidered night-dress. "Is it my diamonds?" she gasped. "Oh, Lucyan, please lock the door!"

Lucyan did not lock the door; perhaps he had not

heard the request. Of all that she had said, he seemed only to have heard the word "diamonds;" and he smiled scornfully as he heard it.

"I wish it was your diamonds!" he laughed, with an evil glitter of his eye.

"Then what is it?" questioned Xenia, preparing to draw her handkerchief from under the pillow. "What has been robbed, Lucyan?"

"Nothing that you know nor could understand. Go to sleep and leave me alone."

"I can't sleep till I know; please, please tell me."

"It is my desk, then," said Lucyan, for the mere sake of peace. "My desk has been robbed. There, leave me alone now."

Lucyan turned without even glancing at his wife's face, and took another turn in the room; but Xenia remained sitting up in her bed, and the air of alarmed distress began to melt from her face.

"Was there any money in the desk, Lucyan?"

"What is that to you? There is no money gone."

"What is there gone?"

"A piece of paper. Now, I suppose, you are much the wiser," he sneered. Lucyan expected her to shrink under the sneer, but she did not. She remained looking at him, while a half-triumphant smile began to dawn round her lips and in her eyes.

"Of course I am much the wiser," she said, while

childish exultation rang in her voice. "It is all right about the piece of paper; it has not been robbed."

Lucyan smiled absently, scarcely listening to the words, and certainly not believing them.

"I know where the paper is!" said Xenia, exultant, although a little hurt at this disregard of her present importance.

"Really," said Lucyan, still in that dull uninterested tone of voice.

"Yes, it was a paper for Aitzig Majulik," she eagerly went on, leaning forward with clasped hands in her effort to rouse Lucyan. "It was for Aitzig Majulik, and you forgot to give it him before you went away."

"What about Aitzig Majulik?" Lucyan asked, slowly.

"Well, Aitzig was in a great hurry for the paper; you forgot to give it him, and I——"

"And you?"

"I gave it him," said Xenia, simply.

Lucyan shrugged his shoulders. "Go to sleep, child," he said; "you are talking nonsense." He was scarcely roused yet. Up to this moment he had been too dazed to adopt any theory, or to attempt any explanation of the disappearance. He had simply recognised the fact and nothing more. This theory suggested by Xenia he thought not worth considering.

His wife had always been so completely separate from his business, that it was very difficult to realise any connection between the two. He was half ashamed of himself for having entered even thus far into the subject with her; it was a mere wasteful bandying of words. As wisely discuss literature with a street-boy as talk of business to Xenia.

"I am not talking nonsense," she said, with her favourite shrug and her prettiest pout. "Aitzig said that he must have the paper, and it was lying in the top of your desk, directly under the lid."

"So it was," said Lucyan, quickly. He had just then reached the far end of the room; he stopped short, and, with his hands behind his back, stood facing his wife. Her last words had hit his attention at last. "Directly under the lid!" Yes; that was the exact way in which the paper had lain. How well he knew the spot! It was strange that she should know it too.

"Yes," chattered on Xenia; "and the desk was open."

"So it was," said Lucyan again, still staring at his wife. "And the paper, what was it like?"

"It was blue, and it was folded in two, this way," going through the action with her hands.

"Exactly; and you took it out?"

"Of course I did."

"And what did you do with it?"

"I gave it to Aitzig Majulik; I told you so already."

"Because he asked for it?"

"He begged for it, and I found it quite easily, without any trouble. You left the desk open on purpose, did you not, Lucyan?"

She got no answer; and looking up, she saw Lucyan walking slowly towards her down the length of the room, with his eyes intent upon her; and, as he came nearer, there was something so terrible in his face, that Xenia, with a shriek, cowered to her pillow, and covered her eyes with her hands.

"No," said Lucyan, "that is not it. Do you know why you gave him the paper? I will tell you. Because you are a fool!"

He was close by the bed, standing over her, as she crouched before him. With one hand he tore down the satin coverlet in which she had hidden her face, and now she could see his eyes gleaming fiercely above her, and his features, as she had never seen them before, distorted with fury.

"You are a fool, Xenia!" he cried, in a passion so sudden and so fearful, that the sight of it seemed to stop the blood in her veins. "You have ruined me and lost me. Oh, why was I cursed with a fool for my wife?"

This transport of rage was all the more awful for

being the first in Lucyan's life. To his sneers, his taunts, and his sarcasm, Xenia had got blunted long ago, but never before had she seen him in a passion. He was much too clever not to have been irritated by her stupidity, and much too fastidious not to have been surfeited long ago by her beauty; but never once had he been even tempted to lose his temper in this or any other contingency in life. This was the first instance of the kind, and, paralysed by surprise, Xenia lay and stared into the face above her.

"Do not stare, but speak!" cried Lucyan. "Staring does not suit you. Methinks you are losing your looks, child; and what remains of a fool when her looks are gone? Ha! Have you nothing to say? Nothing? Nothing to shield yourself with? No excuse? What devil made you give that paper to the Jew? Speak, in heaven's name, but do not stare!" and he shook her by the shoulder.

"It was about Naftali Taubenkübel," she faltered, white with fear—"about his grandchildren."

"What do you know about Naftali Taubenkübel?"

Xenia felt as though her senses were deserting her; she began to sob helplessly.

"He looked so dreadful!" she faltered, in incoherent terror. "I thought he would kill me on the road; and then——"

"*I* will kill you," said Lucyan, "unless you are

quiet this instant! No tears, no noise! I have borne your simpering folly long enough. Have a care now!" His whole face sharpened with passion. He had just enough self-command remaining to keep him from striking his wife, but that was all.

For once in her life Xenia found strength to check her tears. That strength was born of her weakness. Dumfoundered by surprise, paralysed by sheer terror, she lay on her pillow, and the very drops on her eyelashes seemed to hang there frozen; she dared not cry nor speak, she dared not look at her husband, and she dared not look away. Trembling, and pale as death, she cowered under his gaze.

Lucyan stood thus, with his fingers stiffly clasped on the coverlet for a minute longer, staring hard at Xenia's face. It was the face of a beautiful woman to all the world; to him alone it was the face of a fool.

After that minute he dropped the satin quilt and stepped back. The climax of his passion was past already.

"Do not speak, do not move," he said, between his teeth. "Leave me in peace—leave me quite in peace;" and once more he began to pace the room with a fixed and abstracted air, almost as though he had forgotten the very existence of his wife.

And she lay exactly as he had told her, without

moving and without speaking; counting the minutes first and then the hours, as she heard the clock in the passage strike; peeping cautiously through her fingers to watch Lucyan, as incessantly he paced the bedroom floor; shuddering a little whenever he passed the bed, although his eyes never once moved towards her. And as she lay and watched, wakeful all the night through, a feeling unknown to her, a strange sensation of loathing, crept into her heart. The fear that she had felt of her husband hitherto had been but a mental fear. For the first time, to-night she had trembled before him in physical terror.

Never till to-night had any emotion of any sort robbed Xenia of even an hour of that sweet childlike sleep which had been her gift from infancy—the great preserver of her beauty; but now she lay through the whole long night not venturing to move, though her arm was cramped with long lying; listening only with strained attention for the strike of the clock, and looking with fevered eyes for the dawn which should deliver her.

The dawn broke at last, dull, grey, and chilly. Lucyan was still pacing the floor, and Xenia still lay and watched him.

CHAPTER XIV.

"REVANCHE."

"Yes, there be things which we must dream and dare,
And execute ere thought be half aware."
—BYRON.

"I SHOULD be the happiest man alive," said Jan Wronski, sadly, as he entered the back-shop of his apothecary one afternoon—"I should be the happiest man alive if only I could obtain a mad dog at this moment."

There was no one in the back-shop but his daughter Janina, and she scarcely raised her head as her father entered. "Why?" was all she said, in a listless tone.

"Because I have found it now, I have got it at last; from this hour forth the world is delivered of one of its greatest—I might almost venture to say, its *greatest* scourge." Though the words were exultant, the tone was not. Jan Wronski, as he announced his triumph, looked as dismal as ever, and his hair streamed long and lanky over his shirt-collar, thinly veiling his ears.

"The specific for hydrophobia?" answered Janina, without any sign of surprise.

"That it is, and I found it to-day."

"But you found it last year, father; and you found it five years ago; and you found it also the year after I was born."

Jan Wronski waved his hand, and smiled a melancholy smile. "Fancies, visions, foreshadowings," he murmured, "mere shades of the reality which now I have found; all I need is a subject to try it on: and therefore, as I said before, I should be the happiest man in the world if I could obtain a mad dog."

He placed, as he spoke, a heavy glass jar on the table; and then, with clasped hands, stood gazing at it in a sort of rapt ecstasy.

"A subject, a subject,—that is all that I want, Janina. Would it not be a good plan if you stepped into the courtyard and gave one more look at Aesculap in his kennel? It struck me to-day that he was not taking his food with quite his usual eagerness. Supposing *he* were to go mad"—the vision of happiness conjured up was almost too much for Jan Wronski to bear. He uttered a groan of mingled emotions.

"No, it would not be a good plan," said Janina, peevishly. "I am not going to the courtyard any more. I have been there a dozen times to-day, and Aesculap is as sane as any dog ever was; he stole half

a cold chicken this afternoon. I tell you, father, he is hopelessly sane."

Jan sighed despondently, not so much over the lost half chicken, as over the incontestable proof of Aesculap's sanity which it afforded. Innumerable times already had the unfortunate Aesculap been suspected of madness, only to clear himself brilliantly of the imputation. His appetite and humours were studied by his master with a critical and a watchful eye. Jan Wronski was careful every year at Easter-time *not* to let Aesculap taste any morsel of the blest *baba*, which the country-people generally regard as a preservative against hydrophobia; but it was all in vain. Not only did Aesculap refuse to go mad, but he had hitherto shown himself possessed of a mind more regularly balanced than most of his fellows.

"To think that it only wants a subject," said Jan, gazing at the glass jar lovingly. "It was at twenty-one minutes past four that I made the discovery—(I mention the moment, as it will doubtless become historical.) Three drops—no more than three drops out of this bottle—gave the finishing-touch to my work, clenched the business in fact, if I may so express myself,"—and opening his fingers, he disclosed a high and narrow glass bottle, containing a colourless fluid. "Do you see that bottle, Janina?"

"Yes," she said, indifferently. "What is it?"

" It is poison—a deadly poison—with a Latin name which you could not understand and would not remember. Are you attending to me, Janina ? "

" Yes," said Janina, with a movement of weary impatience.

" If you give three drops out of that bottle to a person in health, it will kill him in five minutes; and if you give the same quantity to a man bitten by a mad dog, it will cure him in ten. Is that not a magnificent mystery of Nature ? "

" Very," said Janina, staring at the bottle vacantly.

" I was very near it yesterday," maundered on Jan. " I had laid the foundation, the groundwork, as it were, but those three drops were the crown of my efforts." Slowly and carefully he placed the bottle on the table beside the glass jar. Upon the same table were ranged various small boxes, pots, and bottles, all waiting to be done up in white paper.

" Ah, the orders for to-morrow ! " said Jan, sighing a little, as his eye fell upon them, and giving his lanky mane a spiritless shake. It was a sacrifice to step down from the heights, to leave his discovered specific for ordinary pills and powders which other men had discovered long ago.

" The names are not marked, Janina : how is this ? "

" Could I guess the names ? " she retorted, impatiently.

"To be sure," said Jan, who was rather in awe of his daughter's temper; "I forgot to give you the list. Here, I will dictate, and you can write;" and pulling out a strip of paper, Jan began the dictation: "Tonic powders—Madame Dulceska (the last didn't agree, I have changed the colour of the paper); digestive pills—Professor Kluski (see that the dozen is *not* complete — a useless extravagance, nobody ever counts their pills); sleeping-drops—six drops on sugar night and morning—Pan Bielinski (remember to put a gold paper round the cork). Why are you not writing, Janina?" for Janina, with her pen in her hand, was gazing upwards instead of writing.

"Pan Bielinski," she repeated. "*Which* Pan Bielinski?"

"*The* Pan Bielinski, of course; the Marszalek, not the hussar captain—no hussar ever needs sleeping-drops; and not the other, for he is not likely to awake just yet," said Jan, with a laugh; the apothecary rather prided himself on these dismal jokes. "It is Lucyan Bielinski of Wowasulka."

"And he wants sleeping-drops?"

"He sent for them this afternoon; he has suffered from headaches lately, and is disturbed in his sleep."

"He may well be."

"What is that you said?"

"Did I say anything? It was a mistake,—go on;"

but though she dipped the pen in ink, Janina could not succeed in forming the big B for the Marszalek's name. She made two vain attempts to steady her hand, and then, throwing down the pen, she gave it up.

"Are you ill?" asked her father, not exactly with interest, but with surprise. In flinging down the pen she had all but knocked over his precious bottle, and having hastily rescued the top-heavy flask, he looked at his daughter reproachfully.

"Yes, I am ill," said Janina, grimly. "Has that never struck you before?"

Jan looked at his daughter with a passing touch of alarm. "You *do* look rather pale to-day; I cannot say that I ever noticed it; I am so busy always, you know." So he was, poor man, and always had been, far too busy to notice his daughter's doings and looks. To him she was not a daughter; he had no daughter, he had a machine—a machine which mixed pills and cut out paper rounds and wrote labels. She listened, without hearing them, to his lectures on hydrophobia, and she occasionally frightened him with a burst of temper. But he had got used to that; all machines get out of order at times. To-day it struck him that the machine was more seriously out of order than usual.

"I fancy you used to be pretty, Janina," he said,

dismally—"that was my impression at least; but I do not think you are pretty now. Do you really think you are too ill to write those names? The medicine will be sent for to-night, you know."

Janina took up her pen again wearily. Her father bustled about a minute longer; placed the jar on a shelf, and the high glass bottle beside it. Having done this, he took up a brush and began smoothing his lanky hair; then, with an undecided glance towards his daughter, who never raised her head, he proceeded nervously to trim his nails: finally, with a sudden resolution, he seized his hat and umbrella, and coughed loudly to attract Janina's attention.

She looked up with a frown. The sight of her father, hat in hand, appeared to give her some sort of a shock. "Are you going?" she asked, with a look of fear.

"Yes, on some business." Jan's business consisted just then in paying a round of visits. He was about to drop in upon each of his intimates in turn, and, under the seal of secrecy, to impart to the bookbinder, the hairdresser, and the confectioner, the news of the discovery which burned on his tongue. "You will mind that the packets are neatly done up, Janina," he added; "and you will keep an eye on the shop. I shall not be gone much more than an hour."

"So long!" she said, with a shudder. "Do not go,

father," she cried, all at once ; and rising with unexpected energy, she crossed the room and threw her arms around him. Such exhibitions of tenderness were so rare, that they were apt to embarrass Jan Wronski. He was overwhelmed with embarrassment now, as well as suffocated, by his daughter's embrace.

" Dear me ! to be sure, why should I not go ? You don't want me for the labels, do you ? "

" I—I am afraid," said Janina, in a whisper. Her father gave a good-natured laugh, and absently patted her cheek. He was in mind already watching the envious glance of the hairdresser's eye as the news of the great discovery was broken to him. The hairdresser, it must be understood, had for five years past been working at a rival discovery—a pomatum which was to banish baldness from the world.

" Dear me, Janina, what a child you are for your age ! There—let me go," and unclasping her hands he made straight for the door. He was opening it, when his daughter's voice recalled him.

" Will you not take away that bottle ? " she was saying, speaking slowly, and with her eyes bent obstinately before her.

" Which bottle ? "

" The bottle with that white stuff—with that poison."

" Why should I take it away ? " inquired the dismal apothecary.

"Something might happen to it—it might fall: the shelf is narrow."

"I will put it on a broader one. There—it is quite safe."

"But I wish you would take it away."

"Why?"

"It makes me sick to look at it."

That was no reason for Jan Wronski. "Don't look at it then," he would have said, had he been quicker at repartee. But he was too slow for that; he merely shook his head with an air of melancholy wonder, and gently closed the door behind him. He opened it once more, and whispered through the chink, "Don't forget the gold paper on the Marszalek's medicine; take the ribbed sheet, you know." Janina made no answer. She stood for a minute, just as her father had left her, with her eyes fixed on the floor; while the arms which he had shaken from him sank slowly down to her sides. Then she went back to her chair, and resumed her arrangements of paper and twine. And all this time her heavy eyelids were sunk so low over her eyes, that they appeared as though glued there. It was a dark afternoon, and a drizzly rain was beginning to fall. In the apothecary's back shop the light was spare; and after the front door had fallen shut behind Jan, the silence became almost complete. The rain dripped past the window; and now and then a goose

cackled in the yard, and occasionally Aesculap emerged from his medicine-chest, and rattled his chain as he shook himself; but such subdued sounds scarcely broke the silence for Janina. Silence was hateful to her at all times,—it was insupportable to-day. She fastened up the powders for Madame Dulceska, —she counted out the pills for Professor Kluski, taking care to give him one pill less than the dozen,— and yet she saw neither pills nor powders. Though she never looked towards it, she saw nothing but that high glass bottle on the shelf, with the colourless white fluid. It seemed to her that in the whole room there was nothing but that one bottle; that she was alone with it, for all the other jars and boxes around. She fancied that the bottle had eyes, and was watching her; she fancied that it had fingers, and was beckoning to her; that it had a tongue, and was whispering to her. The sleeping-draught was the last of the medicines to be fastened up. Janina reached it in due course of time, and deliberately unfolding a sheet of gold paper, she began cutting out the round she required. It was not until the round was all but completed that she appeared able to sit still no longer. Dropping the scissors, the paper, and upsetting a box of pills, she rose abruptly to her feet.

Now at last she raised her eyes and looked slowly about her. She looked at everything in the room first:

at the walls, at the ceiling, at the tables and chairs; and last of all, with a defiant turn of the head, she looked at the shelf where the high white bottle stood. Having once looked at it, she could not look away; and she could not keep away. That colourless fluid—did it not look as pure as crystal, as innocent as any water which ever bubbled over mountain-stone? How could it look so harmless and be so deadly? Poison! was it really poison? She would like to convince herself, and already she was crossing the room. It seemed to her that she was being drawn towards that shelf, like a ship towards a loadstone rock; that white bottle was calling to her so loudly to come near it, to touch it, to uncork it and smell it. Janina had placed a chair beside the shelf, and mounting upon it had taken down the bottle. Before she touched it, she kept quiet for a moment, listening. If her father should come back now—if a customer should enter the front shop! Would it be her ruin or her salvation? Was it with dread or with longing that she listened? But no—the opportunity was perfect. Jan was just then safely ensconced beside the confectioner's oven, and no customer came near the shop; there was only the sound of the rain in the water-butt, and a feeble quack in the yard, and another rattle of Aesculap's chain. Alas that it was all so silent and so still,—so silent and so safe for Janina! When she reached the floor again,

she stood leaning breathless against the wall; for the stretching had fatigued her, and for a moment she feared to faint.

Presently she recovered, and looked down at the bottle she held. " Sleeping-drops," she said aloud; " he wants something that will make him sleep: why should he not have it? What was it my father said? Three drops given to a person in health,—yes, yes; that would do. Has my time come at last?"

The hour was past, and Jan was not yet returned. Janina could bear it no longer—could bear the stillness and the loneliness no longer. Snatching up her shawl, and leaving the shop to the mercy of fate, she walked out into the rain.

The town was far behind her before she thought of looking round; and then only she noticed that the dusk was creeping in. Upon the dusk would follow the darkness, and upon the darkness would come the light of another day. And that other day; what would it bring? Misery and remorse; shame and disgrace. They were upon her already. With sudden terror she now thought of what she had done. Perhaps it was the sharpness of the October air which had given her back her senses,—the question was, whether it had given them back too late.

Janina started homewards, running in the teeth of the rain. She had no notion how long she had been

gone from home, nor how late it was; but the falling dusk filled her with apprehension.

On the *Place* she passed Professor Kluski's little boy, bearing away the incomplete dozen of pills which were to assist his papa's digestion; on the door-steps she ran against Madame Dulceska's cook, carrying off her mistress's powders; and brushing past this indigdant female, she burst breathless into the shop.

"Has the Marszalek sent for his sleeping-drops?" she inquired fiercely of her father, who stood behind the counter.

"No, he has not," answered Jan, somewhat testily. He had intended to receive his daughter with a reprimand for her abandonment of the shop; but he looked at her face and changed his mind.

"Then they are here still?"

"No, they are not; I gave them to a man who passed the door on his way to Wowasulka. How you have been running! Was it because you forgot the gold paper?" asked Jan, anxiously.

"No," said Janina, with a strange laugh; "I put the gold paper on." And a minute later she asked, "Who has taken the bottle?"

It was Aitzig Majulik, who, passing that way, had been espied by Jan Wronski; and who, for a consideration of course, had consented to carry the Marszalek's medicine to Wowasulka.

CHAPTER XV.

JANINA THROWS UP HER CARDS.

"Oh, agony of fear!
Would that he yet might live!"
—*The Cenci:* SHELLEY.

THE early October dusk was stealing over the world, when the door of the Wowasulka drawing-room slowly opened, and with her finger on her lip, and a skirt which trailed black and noiseless behind her, there entered on tiptoe, Mademoiselle Robertine.

Having closed the door with extreme caution, she advanced to the centre of the room, and there came to a standstill, carefully shading the candle she held, and shooting glances of scrutiny and criticism into the furthest and the darkest corners of the apartment. Had there been any spectator present to witness Robertine's entry, he surely could not have suppressed a *frisson*—a cold shudder of awe and curiosity—as she stood thus, black, motionless, inscrutable, gazing slowly to the right and to the left. The room, commonplace

and everyday before, assumed all at once a look of mystery. Every shadow deepened as though to hide a secret. She brought the atmosphere into the room with her, as she entered by the door: it was the only sort she could live in. Wowasulka would never have been Robertine's home for so long had Lucyan not known how, by artificial means, to preserve this atmosphere around her. He kept her money for her, and managed it for her too; and there was so much delicious secrecy about the locking up of that money and the doling out of it, and so many charmingly mysterious consultations concerning it, that Robertine many a time blessed her youngest nephew in her heart, —admired his discretion, prudence, and delicate tact, —and never for a moment doubted the extreme advantage of leaving her money in his hands.

What dark deed, then, had this awful woman come to do in this dark hour? Was she preparing to elope? But where was to be found a man with such reckless boldness? Was she a second Lady Macbeth? And was that a dagger she held?

No, it was only a key. That key locked the cupboard in the dining-room. To hide every key in her charge was a necessity of Robertine's nature; but she had found no place to-night which could satisfy her, regarding the safety of the cupboard-key.

"The top of the clock is too slippery," she mur-

mured, "and the hole in the footstool is getting too big. Last time I rammed it down the sofa back, but I am afraid the servants have guessed the place."

Carefully lifting a corner of the carpet she placed the key underneath; then shook her head and withdrew it. She tried to bury it in an old pile of *Journaux des Demoiselles;* she attempted to make it disappear among the bushy twigs of one of Lucyan's window-plants,—her genius was indefatigable, but dissatisfied. After each trial she retired a few steps, and, with her head on one side, stood to view the effect. She went out by the door and came in again, in order to assure herself personally of what a stranger could see. But the carpet appeared to her to be transparent, and the rhododendron looked treacherous; and, with another shake of the head, the key would be withdrawn, and intrusted to another place.

Twice she wandered round the room disconsolate. The third time an idea struck her. The white porcelain stove had attracted her eye. Crouching down beside it, she opened the small brass door. There, smooth, soft, and grey, lay a bed of ashes. So deep, so safe a bed for the precious key to sleep in. Tenderly she laid it to rest; carefully, with her long lean fingers, did she rake the ashes over it.

It was a stroke of genius, and Robertine thought so; but even now, at the eleventh hour, and after the

little brass door was shut again, she began to doubt. What if the snow should come overnight and the stove be lit next morning? What if a servant should take it into his head to clear away the last year's ashes? Would not the rhododendron be safer? or perhaps the door-mat? And Robertine stood hesitating, with grave misgivings in her mind. She thought —yes, she was almost sure—she remembered how Kazimir last spring had opened the grating to throw in a cigar-stump. Supposing he did it again! Kazimir was her bugbear: he concentrated in his person more dangers to her secrets than all the rest of the world put together. His spurs tore up carpets, his sleeves brushed down vases, and laid bare her mysteries to the light of the day. He was always sure to interrupt her mysterious interviews with tradesmen, and to burst in just at the mystic moment when she was telling the butcher's boy in a hushed voice to bring eight cutlets next day. And now, what was that step in the passage? Robertine trembled as she listened. If it were Kazimir, and he should enter at this moment!

But Robertine's mind might have been at rest; that step in the passage was not Kazimir's. Kazimir, just then, was at some distance from the spot, riding along through the rain with his back turned to Wowasulka. He had been in Tarajow seeing after some regimental business, and he was on his way home now. Some

days had passed since he had last been at Wowasulka; but his thoughts were there as he rode along through the thin, fine rain, which pricked his face like needle-points. The bridle was slippery in his hands, and the ground was slippery under the horse's feet. Trappisto, with his wet tail between his legs, and that dismal, uncomplaining, yet spiritless resignation which was peculiar to his character, trotted faithfully in and out of the puddles which each footfall of his master's horse left behind it.

The grey of the clouds melted into the grey of the falling dusk. Indistinct forms were here and there grouped around indistinct willow-trees: cows, standing with drooped heads, as motionless as the willows themselves, while the rain trickled from the branches on their backs, and from their backs to the trampled grass. The outlines of beasts and bushes alike were blotted out by the mist.

Of all this Kazimir saw little, for he had drawn the hood of his brown cloak low over his forehead, so that his view was limited to a pair of wet horse's ears, the bit of road, and now, on ahead, the foot-bridge which was to be seen between them. When he was within twenty paces of the bridge, he heard a splash in the water, and when he had drawn a little nearer he could see that in the blurred landscape-picture before him, there was also a figure, blurred like the

landscape by the falling rain. It was upon the bridge that the figure stood; and it might have been the spot, or it might have been the attitude, which instantly carried back Kazimir's thoughts to that Easter-eve last spring, the day when he had heard that a Wowasulka letter awaited him at home.

He had crossed the ford at least a hundred times since, and a hundred times passed by that lonely bridge; but never except on that day, and on this, had that figure, or any figure, stood there.

Before he had got much nearer Kazimir recognised that it was the same figure. A woman, with a shawl around her, leaning over the railing, her back to him, and her eyes on the water. It almost seemed to Kazimir as if she had stood thus ever since, splashing stones into the water, just as she had done on Easter-eve.

"Good evening," he called out as he reached the edge of the stream. He had not spoken to Janina since their meeting on this spot, nor had he in fact set eyes on her from that day to this. Of all that had passed between the apothecary's daughter and Marcin, he had but a very dim notion. On the day of his brother's funeral he had not been able to quit his station, and of the stormy incident which had occurred then, he knew only as much as Lucyan had thought fit to tell him.

At the sound of his voice Janina turned, and before he had time to follow up his careless greeting with any other word she had left the bridge, and with two precipitate steps towards him, almost sprang at his horse's reins.

"Stop! wait! turn back!" she panted, short of breath." You must not cross that stream; you must go back at once—at once!"

"What is it?" asked Kazimir in alarm, for Janina's face, as he saw it close before him, seemed to him very much like the face of a maniac. With both hands she was pulling at the reins, while the frightened horse backed snorting before her.

"What is it? What has happened? Why are you here?" he asked, stunned with surprise.

"I am here to meet you; I have waited for you there on that bridge; I have waited for an hour, for more than an hour. I thought you would pass this way; I thought you could not escape me here. Have you been at Wowasulka?"

"No, not to-day."

"Go there at once;" and with all her strength she tugged the horse round, despite its plunging; while Kazimir, dumfoundered by her violence, and bewildered by the whole occurrence, sat passive through it all.

"Why must I go to Wowasulka?"

"Something has happened there."

"An accident?"

"A dreadful accident—a fearful accident; will you not go?—it may be too late. Oh, will you not go?"

"But I know nothing, you have told me nothing," said Kazimir, beginning to be seriously although vaguely alarmed. "Is—is it Xenia, my sister-in-law? Is she ill?"

"No, it is not her. Have you a heart?"

"I think I have."

"Save your brother, then! Say you will save him!"

"Tell me how," said Kazimir, watching her with some misgivings.

All this time she had been dragging the horse by its bridle along the path which he had just traversed. Now she stopped as if in sudden weakness, and standing beside him in the rain, she fixed her black and burning eyes upwards on his face. She had been a pretty woman when Kazimir had seen her in spring; but the months that were past, and the emotions which they had brought, had worked fearful havoc with her youth and her freshness; she was almost ugly to look at now.

"Tell me what I can do," said Kazimir, looking down at her.

"Your brother has got sleeping-drops," she breathlessly explained.

"I daresay he has. Well?"

"He will take them to-night."

"Very likely."

"And they are poisoned."

"That cannot be," was Kazimir's instinctive answer.

"I tell you that they are. I—I—oh God, I poisoned them myself!"

"Impossible," said Kazimir, who, the more he looked at her face, felt the more convinced that she was mad.

She seemed to read that look through the dusk, and her ear detected the pity in his voice.

"You think I am mad!" she cried, bursting into a paroxysm of convulsive though tearless sobs. "You think I am raving, and you will not believe me; and I—oh, I counted on you. You were my last hope; you might have saved it all. I waited for you. Oh how, how shall I make you understand me? How shall I make you believe me?"

Thus, and in still wilder words, she raved for some minutes more; and Kazimir watched the noisy exhibitions of her agony in silence. In his present bewilderment there was nothing that he could say or do to help them both out of this inexplicable and undefinable dilemma.

When she had sobbed thus for a minute or two without receiving any check from Kazimir, she began

to recognise the necessity for immediate calmness. As long as she continued to exhibit this violence, so long would he continue to doubt her sanity; and the first necessity was that he should recognise that she was sane, and believe the story which she had to tell him. She forced back her tears, dashing her hand across her eyes; she pulled the wet leaves off the nearest willow-bush, twisting them between her fingers in her frantic attempts at regaining calmness.

"Listen to me," she said, in quite another tone this time. "I will convince you that I am sane. Will you listen to me for five minutes?"

"Certainly," said Kazimir.

"Tell me, then," she laid her two hands on his arm, —and Kazimir noticed that they were quite steady now,—"tell me whether you ever heard your brother Marcin spoken of in connection with me?"

"Yes," said Kazimir, reluctantly, "I have."

"Tell me what you heard exactly."

He looked before him and was silent.

"I understand; yes, you are too noble and delicate-minded to say it, but I understand quite well. You heard that he was my lover, but you heard quite wrong. He was my husband."

Kazimir turned his head and looked at her carefully through the dusk.

"I was his wife for four years. He would have

married me openly first, but his mother refused her consent, and after that he married me secretly. We were married in the Tarajow church; but the Tarajow church has been burnt down since. You must have heard of how he asked his mother's consent?"

"Yes, I heard of that," said Kazimir, still watching her face.

"And do you believe me?" she asked, suspiciously.

"Yes."

"You believe that your brother married me?" she asked again, not quite credulous.

"Yes, I believe it."

"I bless you for that," she cried, with another hysterical sob; and seizing upon his hand, she would have kissed it, if he had not prevented her. "I told the same story to your brother in almost the same words, and he——"

"Yes," said Kazimir, as she broke off and stood for a moment with clenched hands and fixed eyes. The murderous mood was upon her again.

"He did not believe me; he scorned me; he laughed and smiled; he stroked my shoulder as though I had been a plaything; he drove me wild; he made me mad. I have seen that look before me for two months past; I saw it to-day as I mixed the poison. Do you understand now about the poison?" she asked, with a

quick change of tone, and she clutched his arm. "Do you not see?"

Kazimir was beginning to understand. "You put poison in the medicine?" he asked, slowly.

"Yes;" she hung her head; "but I would not have done it if it had been to revenge myself alone; but I was mad with the thought of my child, and as the time came near I became desperate. I am a wretched, wretched woman, but I bless you for believing me. Tell me again that it is quite true you believe me."

It was quite true. Kazimir had been startled, but he had not doubted her word for a moment. Even had there not been so much terrible truth on the face of Janina's story, it scarcely would have occurred to him to doubt a woman's solemn word. Perhaps this propensity was but another phase of what Lucyan called his folly. He was, to use Heine's phrase, a knight who was ready to break a lance for the purity of every lily—a universal champion of womankind—an enthusiast who went about armed to the teeth, as ready to fight for the spotlessness of Mary Queen of Scots as for that of an organ-grinder's daughter who should happen to be wronged in his presence,—a man who thought that good women were perfect, indifferent women good, and bad women unfortunate. Janina

having told her story to such a man as this, what wonder that she was believed? more especially as her story happened to be true. His tone reassured her, and softened her perhaps; for her tears began to flow now, as she stood for a minute quite silent on the pathway. A mournful wind was sweeping over the willows, and, as the wet leaves were blown backwards, they shivered and turned ghastly white in the dusk. These silent listeners seemed to grow pale and to tremble, hearing Janina's story.

"This afternoon I mixed the poison," said Janina, after that short pause, "and this evening the drops were carried to Wowasulka. To-night your brother is to take them, and the first dose will kill him; do you understand?"

"Yes," said Kazimir, gathering up his reins, though he felt still rather confused; "I will go."

"Thank God! you will save your brother; but—but," she stammered, "what will you say?"

"I do not know," said Kazimir; "but I shall not betray you."

"Ah!" she breathed a sigh of relief; even though she was wound up to the pitch of self-betrayal, to be thus shielded filled her with a sudden sense of comfort and security. "But only go quick, or you may come too late. Quick, quick!" Her excitement was

beginning to break out again, now that the restraint was lifted. "Why do you not go on? Why do you not spur your horse?"

He was spurring his horse already—he was gone while she spoke; and Janina stood on the pathway alone with the shuddering, whispering willows.

CHAPTER XVI.

HIGH PLAY.

"And now (as oft in some distempered state),
On one nice trick depends the general fate,
An Ace of Hearts steps forth."
—POPE.

THROUGH the darkness and the rain Kazimir galloped all the way to Wowasulka. He had been rather slow to take fire; rather reluctant, through sheer stupefaction, to give credit to Janina's story; but now he saw and believed, and trembled lest he should come too late. Being of an imaginative temperament, there is no saying in what extravagant fancies he may have indulged during that wild ride through the rain,—how he may have seen himself spring from the saddle just in time to dash the cup from Lucyan's lip,—or reaching the house to find that it was already a house of mourning. The image of that woman's face, with the guilt and terror stamped upon it, and the image of Lucyan measuring out his fatal dose, rose alternately before his eyes. His horse was still at full

gallop as its hoofs clattered over the garden gravel, and the first thing Kazimir saw was that the bedroom windows were dark, while there was a light in the drawing-room. He breathed a little more freely. If Lucyan was still in the drawing-room he would most likely not have taken his sleeping-drops yet. There was some hope now that he had reached aright. He scarcely took time to fasten his horse to the nearest rose-bush before he hastily entered the house.

In the long passage within it was all pitch-dark; but Kazimir, groping his way forward with his hands before him, had scarcely made two steps when he heard a whisper.

"Is that you, Kazimir?"

"Yes," he said, standing still, for it was Xenia's voice which had spoken; he knew it on the instant, as he would have known it amongst a thousand others. But there was a note in the crystal bell not as clear nor as serene as usual; the silver flute was tuned to a minor key.

"Oh, I am so glad you have come!" she said, with a half sob. "Where are you? Are you near me?" There was a rustle of drapery, and in another minute there was a small soft hand feeling along Kazimir's wet coat, and all down the sleeve, till it reached his hand. The fingers fastened around his and clung there. "Oh, you must not go," she said; "I hoped you would come

at last;" and still holding him by the hand, she drew him on a few steps along till she reached a door. This she flung open, and light streamed out upon them.

They stood in the drawing-room; a shaded lamp dimly illuminated the space, and revealed Xenia's figure. Her teeth were chattering with cold; a shawl was drawn tightly round her shoulders, and some raindrops hung upon her hair. "We are alone here," she whispered. "Oh, I am so glad! I have been hiding outside all the evening; I dare not go to bed to-night."

"Where is Lucyan?" asked Kazimir, abruptly.

Xenia had not let go his hand yet. At his question she clung to it more tightly still, and throwing a curiously frightened glance over her shoulder, shrank a step nearer to him.

"Do not speak so loud, please; I do not want him to hear you."

"But I must see him," said Kazimir, attempting to withdraw his hand.

"Not now, please—not now; later—to-morrow."

"But where is Lucyan?" he exclaimed, half wild with impatience, and still breathless with the haste and excitement of the last hour.

"I don't know; in his room, I think, writing."

"Are you sure?" urged Kazimir, earnestly.

"Yes, I think so; why do you ask so much?"

"When did you see him last?"

Xenia's fine eyebrows began to knit in displeasure.

"I wish you would not talk of Lucyan," she said, in a tone of vexation. "I want you to attend to me, and not to Lucyan."

"He is writing in his room?" repeated Kazimir, scarcely having heard her last words. "Are you quite sure he is there?"

"Yes, of course I am quite sure."

"And he has not taken his medicine yet? When is he to take it?"

"His medicine?" repeated Xenia, more and more surprised, as well as provoked by this strange interest in his brother, and this still more strange indifference to herself. "The bottle which Aitzig Majulik brought? Oh, I don't know; before he goes to bed, I suppose."

"Are you quite sure he is not ill?"

Xenia shrugged her shoulders. "He may be ill; I think he must be, or he could not behave to me as he does. Oh, Kazimir! I have suffered so much, so dreadfully! I cannot bear it any more. A second night like that would kill me; it really would. Do you know that I did not close my eyes last night for a moment—not for one single moment?" She raised them slowly to his face as she spoke. That terror, sadness, distress, who knows what, which rang in her

voice, was mirrored in her widely opened eyes and in every line of her shrinking figure. The lids were heavy from want of sleep; the tender colour was faded from her face, almost gone from her lips; her hair was ruffled and disordered. And yet she was almost more beautiful thus than in the smiling serenity of her everyday beauty. Her blue eyes, encircled by dark lines, seemed to have grown black in the shadow; every line of her features was deepened, while in her hair the rain-drops sparkled like diamonds.

Kazimir read all these signs in the dim lamp-light, but he read them in an indistinct and far-off way, for he was still too full, mind and body, of the errand on which he had come; his pulses were still flying in too hot a haste to let him be quite sensible of Xenia's look. A cloud of excitement hung before his eyes, dividing him from her for the moment.

And while he stood thus, feeling her beauty, without quite realising that he did so, there was the sound of a distant door opening, and in the same minute Lucyan's step was heard in the passage.

"He is coming in here!" was the thought which struck them both, although neither of them spoke it. Had Kazimir been calmer, he would have been frightened by the pallor which spread over Xenia's face, as, with parted lips, she stood and listened to her husband's steps.

But Lucyan was not coming in here. The step passed close to the door without pausing,—passed on till it reached another door, which quickly was opened and closed.

That was the bedroom door, Kazimir knew from the sound; and now the moment for action was surely come. Lucyan had in all probability gone there to take his sleeping-drops. The situation could scarcely be more urgent than it was. With a wrench Kazimir tore away his hand, and reached the door; but Xenia's fingers closed over his again as he touched the handle; and once more he was held back.

There were tears of vexation in her eyes now as she raised them to his.

"Why do you treat me so, Kazimir? why will you go when I ask you to stay? I have so much to tell you; I want to ask your advice: why will you go away?"

"Because there is something that I have to do."

"Cannot you wait a little longer? I am sure there is no hurry; I wish you were not so unkind!"

"But I cannot wait," said Kazimir, in an agony. "Every minute is fearfully precious. Let me go, I entreat you."

"Not unless you tell me what it is," she said, with a half-sweet, half-pettish smile breaking through her tears.

"It is a danger,—a great danger,—and I can avert it if you let me go."

"A danger?" her eyes dilated in alarm. "What is it about?"

"It is about Lucyan."

"Go on."

"There has been an attempt,—no, I mean there has been a mistake: there is poison in his medicine!"

"Poison!" Xenia's pale face lost its last trace of colour.

"Yes; but it is not yet too late: it only needs one word to save him,—only you must let me go."

"What will you do if I let you go?"

"I will save him, of course; have I not told you so?"

"Yes." Her eyes, wide and distended, were fixed upon his face; she was still as pale as before, but her tears had been suddenly checked.

"And if I do not let you go?" Unconsciously as she said it, her fingers tightened upon his sleeve.

"It would be too late then," said Kazimir, startled at the tone of her voice.

"Too late to save him?"

"Yes."

"And he would die then?" she asked, below her breath, shuddering at the word even while she said it.

"Yes, I fear so."

"And if he should die?" she said, very slowly; and at that moment—dangerous, terrible moment—their eyes met full.

She stared at him some seconds longer, and then she burst into tears.

"Do not go," she sobbed, with her face in her hands. "Do not go to him; stay here."

The words were clear; yet Kazimir doubted whether he heard aright. Gazing at her, he stood rooted to the spot, and her sobbed-out words poured upon his ear.

"I can bear it no longer; I hate him,—I hate him!" It was by far the strongest expression which Xenia had used in her life,—as this burst of tears also was the thing nearest approaching a passion of which this sweet and flower-like woman had ever been guilty. But even in the midst of it she remained sweet and flower-like still. She stood and sobbed, frightened at herself,—frightened at the words she had used, yet not withdrawing them; terrified at the thought betrayed, yet not disowning it. What had she said? She had not meant it,—that is to say, yes; at least she meant that she did not know; only she was very miserable—miserable.

Kazimir, shocked and distressed—pained that so soft a creature should have been capable of so hard a thought,—stood by and listened. From the moment of Janina's confession and entreaty, his haste had

been so great that he had never paused to analyse the situation. The necessity of saving his brother had been the only thing he saw; consequences and possibilities had had no place in his mind. But Xenia's words, — more still, her look — that glance between them,—had startled him into perfect consciousness.

Ay, what if Lucyan should die? What then? Dimly he began to understand what would be then. The fire which he had caught from Janina seemed to go out suddenly. Was it Xenia's tears that quenched it?

Her beauty—indistinct and far off a minute ago—became real and close again to his fully awakened senses. He stood and looked upon the graceful figure, —the rounded shoulders that heaved with sobs—the beautifully drooped head upon which the rain-drops shone; and as he listened to her narrative, the urgency of the moment, the danger and the hurry, all gave way to a sense of burning indignation.

"I thought he would strike me," she said; "I thought he would kill me; he glared at me so with his dreadful eyes; and oh, Kazimir, he called me a fool!"

"Is that true?" asked Kazimir; and his right hand clenched.

"It is true,—it is quite true."

"He treated you like that?"

"Yes; and that was not the worst: he said that—

oh, it is so dreadful!—he said I was losing my looks! I cannot bear it any more,—I have been hiding from him all the evening. Oh, Kazimir! dear Kazimir! what am I to do? Can you not help me? Can you not take me away? I should be safe with you!"

Her frightened eyes were fixed upwards on his face; and once more her hand sought his. He knew every one of her glances, and each of her gestures, by heart; he had studied their grace and their charm continually; but this glance and this gesture he did not know. There was something in her eyes, wild and tear-blurred as they were, which had never before been there. That look he had never seen,—not in the salt-mine, not in the sledge-drive, not on the day when he had given her back the flower. This was something beyond coquetry,—something beyond flirtation. This he had once hoped for as the greatest prize in life, and despaired of obtaining, and wept for, because it was stolen from him.

The weeks and months past had worked this change: Lucyan's sneers had worked it almost more than Kazimir's love. Lucyan had succeeded at last in wearying out even her meekness. She had borne her slavery as few slaves do. She might have forgiven his burst of fury; she might have digested the insult of being called a fool; but to be told that she was losing her looks had

lashed even her gentle spirit into rebellion. She was wound up to the highest pitch of passion possible to her. So far as she could hate, she hated her husband; so far as she could love, she loved his brother.

For Kazimir it was a terrible moment. There was a mingling of joy and horror in the discovery he had made. Like a pair of foolish children, they had played with fire, and this moment was their punishment. She loved him, and was clinging to him for protection, —was imploring him to deliver her. And it was so easy to do so: there was but that one life between them; a few minutes and that life might be no more. Was not that poor distracted Janina perhaps but the instrument of Providence? How could the man deserve to live who had called Xenia a fool? Impossible! Kazimir's heart cried out for revenge,—revenge for his cheated love, revenge for his stolen birthright. It was the destroyer of his happiness whom he was asked to save. Oh, it was too much! this could not be justice.

Such thoughts come to good men as easily as to bad ones; and good men listen to them sometimes, and sometimes good men fall. For we are so weak, even the strongest of us; and the greatest, after all, so very small.

To gain back by a single stroke all that he had lost! A tempting demon whispered it; and Kazimir listened,

drinking in the sweet temptation. He stood there, hesitating, bewildered; torn by a hundred distracting thoughts; puzzled by a hundred doubts, which were new and strange to him; dazzled by the betrayal of Xenia's love; and surely—oh yes, surely—made happy by it. That something within him was jarred, and had been jarred since, in her first outburst, she called on him not to go to Lucyan, he indistinctly felt. Did she now want him to go? Did she want him to stay? She stood there, behind the impenetrable shield of her tears—not asking him to stay, nor telling him to go, —not speaking, only weeping unanswerable and unanswering floods. Such floods, even wept by angels, are often more perilous than the most demoniacal temptation.

Ah, Kazimir, Kazimir! honourable man though you be, was it Honour alone which gave you the victory at this moment? Was it Virtue alone which made the dark cloud to pass? Or was it that, even while you gazed and listened, the temptation, unknown to yourself, unacknowledged by you, was weakening?

How it was Kazimir did not know; but he found his strength again, and dashed from the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

A MISDEAL.

"For 'tis a truth well known to most,
That whatsoever thing is lost,
We seek it, ere it come to light,
In every cranny but the right."
—COWPER.

As he flung open the bedroom door, Kazimir saw Lucyan standing beside a further table, with his back turned. He looked round slowly as his brother entered.

"Thank heavens!" was Kazimir's first word.

"You here, Kazimir?"

"Where is your medicine?" asked Kazimir, not calm enough to attempt any explanation.

"Do you know what o'clock it is?"

"No," said Kazimir, rather wildly; "it may be midnight for aught I know, or mid-day. Where is your medicine?"

"That is exactly what *I* want to know," said Lucyan, irritably, "and exactly what no one can tell me."

"I do not understand you——"

"I daresay not; as little as I can understand aunt Robertine. What on earth makes that cursed old woman shuffle away her keys into infernally mysterious holes, which she cannot herself trace an hour afterwards, far surpasses my comprehension."

"But that is not the question," said Kazimir, surprised at this tone and language, of which he had never before known his brother to be guilty. "What has the key got to do with your medicine?"

"What have *you* got to do with my medicine, if I may ask?"

"Everything on earth. You have not taken it yet?"

"I have not had the chance."

"But it is in the house?"

Lucyan shrugged his shoulders. "*Que sais-je?* It reached the house, at all events."

"By Aitzig Majulik?"

"Yes. How do you happen to know?" asked Lucyan, staring at his brother.

"By a chance. And where is it now?"

"In the jam-cupboard, I believe," said Lucyan, grimly; "but where the key of the jam-cupboard is you need not ask me. Aunt Robertine has juggled it away, according to her invariable habit. Every key of every cupboard in the house has been daily hidden, I

believe; but I shall put a stop to this," said Lucyan, sternly. "That old woman is becoming worse than useless; her memory is failing her. I should have taken my sleeping-drops long ago if it had not been for aunt Robertine."

"Dear aunt Robertine!" broke out Kazimir, with a burst of unexpected affection. "Dear, good aunt Robertine! I never thought that I should live to bless her eccentricities."

Lucyan was watching his brother curiously. "When you have quite done your raptures about aunt Robertine, I suppose you will tell me what you are here for."

"I will tell you now: I want you not to take that medicine."

Lucyan gave a faint smile. "Are you afraid of my health suffering? How considerate, *mon frère!*"

"Yes—no," stammered Kazimir, reddening. "I want you to promise that you will not take it."

"Really? And what am I to do with it, pray?"

"Throw it away," said Kazimir, without reflecting.

"And your reasons? They are excellent, no doubt."

"I cannot give them."

"That is a pity," said Lucyan, drily; but in his eyes suspicion gleamed. "They would have been worth hearing, no doubt."

Kazimir gnawed at his under lip, not trusting himself

to speak. There rushed over him a violent repulsion—a strong disgust of this man whose life he had come to save, and who had treated two women as Lucyan had treated Janina and Xenia. He had long ago felt that he hated his brother; but he had never plainly told himself so until to-day. Angry words crowded to his lips; old wrongs awoke up again and urged him to speak; but he dared not trust himself, for Janina's secret was upon his mind, and he feared by an imprudent word to betray her.

Lucyan did not take his eyes from his brother's face, but stood gently passing the comb through his hair. Kazimir had never before noticed, but at this moment he noticed, that the hair about Lucyan's temples was beginning to turn grey. His face, as he stood now with the lamp-light upon it, looked haggard and worn; the eyes were sunken, the habitual pallor intensified.

"It is no use asking me questions," said Kazimir, after that pause; "but there has been some mistake about the medicine—you had better not take it, it might——"

"Disagree with me?" finished Lucyan, with fine interrogation.

"Yes, I am afraid so."

"So you evidently are. And the mistake? Do you happen to know who made it?"

"I do not know—the bearer, I suppose," said Kazi-

mir, steadily ; feeling at this moment only the necessity of shielding Janina at any price.

"Aitzig Majulik ?"

"I daresay ; I do not know ; it is no use asking me."

"Apparently not. Are you going now ?"

Kazimir was going, for he could no longer bear to watch the sneer upon Lucyan's thin lips.

"Yes, I am going ; but I shall be back to-morrow. I promised her,—that is to say, I shall probably be here."

"Exactly ; you will happen to be passing by the merest chance. Wowasulka lies so very conveniently on your way ; only an insignificant *détour* of a couple of miles. Oh, I understand quite well ; good-night, *mon frère !*"

Lucyan stood alone in his bedroom — thinking. So there had been a mistake about his medicine, had there ? The medicine which Aitzig Majulik had brought.

That mistake and its exact nature took a strong hold upon Lucyan's mind. It was an interesting problem ; all the more interesting because it could not be solved to-night. It appeared that even next day the solution was not immediately to be had ; for morning came, and the forenoon wore on, and the key of the jam-cupboard remained invisible.

All the interest and energy of the household seemed

to have become concentrated on that one little bit of steel. A general and perpetual search was carried on. Carpets were lifted, dresses were shaken out, boxes were emptied. Every vase was peered into, and every drawer was opened. A stranger entering the house unannounced would have been puzzled to explain the variety of strange positions and wholly unaccountable movements in which the inmates were indulging. Everybody walked about armed with a stick, or a broom, or a parasol, with which they poked into distant corners and stirred up dust; everybody got upon chairs to explore the lofty tops of presses, and came down again choked with more dust. Occasionally was to be seen a person in a position entirely horizontal, vainly attempting to gain an underview of a wardrobe or a chest of drawers, and regaining the perpendicular, red and breathless, and wrapped in clouds of dust. Dust, nothing but the eternal dust!

Should the key not be found before evening, Lucyan had resolved to send for a locksmith. Most men would have sent for one at once; but it always went against the grain with Lucyan to admit that he was baffled in any undertaking. In the meantime he had gone to the extent of offering a florin's reward to whichever servant should bring him the key.

What Robertine suffered during this long-drawn-out torture, the words of ordinary language are far too

feeble to describe. To her it was all thumbscrew and rack. Every drawer that was opened wrung her heart, every single poke that was made by an exploring broomstick seemed to strike her mystery-loving breast. She began by fighting for each spot in turn, but soon had to yield before Lucyan's determination. Mournful and desperate she followed the searchers about from room to room and from corner to corner, watching the devastation of all her most cherished sanctuaries, as a mother watches the murder of her children. And they were murdered in vain. Alas! she knew that neither in the curtains nor under the carpets was the key of the jam-cupboard to be found. She knew that the key of the storeroom was under the sofa-cushion, and the key of the larder in a hole in the wall; but it was in vain that she questioned her overtaxed memory as to the hiding-place of the jam-cupboard key. Well might she feel mournful, for Lucyan had hinted that henceforward all keys should remain in his own keeping; and what would life be to Robertine without keys? And what would keys be without hiding-places?

Lucyan sat at table with a dark cloud upon his brow; and Xenia sat opposite to him in unbroken silence.

They were just rising from table, when Xenia started and flushed at the sound of horse-hoofs on the gravel.

"Ah yes," said Lucyan, with a sharp glance at his wife—the first he had given her to-day—"he promised that he would come again."

"Is the key found?" was Kazimir's first word.

"No," said Lucyan, shortly; "and oblige me by shutting the door; I never had a taste for draughts."

Lucyan shivered as he spoke; and yet it was a mild October day, grey and dull, but as warm and still as a day in June. Kazimir said as much, and added that the evening was clearing for a glorious sunset. "Come into the garden," he said, "and you will see it."

Lucyan declined the garden. He was chilly and restless; he wandered away by himself; and, still looking about him in a sort of hopeless and aimless way for the lost key, he entered the drawing-room. Neither of the other two followed him; he did not notice this until through the drawing-room window he caught sight of his brother and his wife standing on the gravel-walk. Trappisto was beside them, earnestly endeavouring to detach the root of a blue aster plant from the earth.

Every flower was heavy with yesterday's rain; but to-night there was a burst of brilliant light in the west, which turned all the drops of water into drops of gold. The sharp-edged clouds, gathering together, began to drift away in purple banks.

The garden bore a look of neglect, slight, but yet

unusual. The flowers, beaten down by the rain, had not been tied up; many of them lay with their neglected faces pressed to the damp earth. The rotting dahlia-heads had not been clipped off, the branch of a rose-bush trailed to the ground. And if there was neglect hinted at in the foreground, there was in the background outspoken destruction; for there, beside the forest-edge, the labourers were at work, blasting the rocks and clearing the space for the railway.

Lucyan turned away shivering from it all. He hated the clouds, and the sunshine which was chasing them away; he hated his wife and his brother; he almost hated his railway. He hated the world and all things in it.

"Warm and mild!" he said aloud, bitterly. "Kazimir calls the day warm and mild. I say that it is cold and sharp. I am in a cold fever, I think; my hands are like blocks of ice," and mechanically he held them towards the porcelain stove. "It is time to light it," he murmured. The stoves at Wowasulka were rarely lit before November; "but, after all," thought Lucyan, as he stooped and opened the brass door, "I am rich enough to buy wood."

A heap of grey ashes lay within; and probably it was only from the habit acquired to-day of sounding every corner, that Lucyan touched the ashes with his

finger-tips. The grey heap crumbled under his hand, and he felt something hard beneath. In the next minute he had drawn out a large key. He looked it all over carefully, and assured himself that this was the key of the jam-cupboard.

"I have saved a florin," was his first instinctive thought; he need reward no servant, and pay no locksmith now. It is economical to find one's lost things one's self.

Having carefully closed the brass door, Lucyan stood for a minute clutching the recovered key tightly, while an ugly look of cunning dawned in his eyes. One glance out of the window showed him Kazimir and Xenia, with their backs safely turned. Leaving the drawing-room softly, he walked across the passage to the dining-room; there were no servants within sight or hearing.

Quite gently the key turned in the lock, and with a subdued groan the cupboard-door swung open.

Rows of glass jam-pots stood before Lucyan, labelled "gooseberry" and "currant" in Robertine's angular writing. On the "shelf of honour" stood the rose-jam, which Xenia always told strangers she had made herself. The contents of the lowest shelf were more miscellaneous; and here, between a mustard-jar and a bottle of extra fine *wódki*, there stood a

smaller bottle with a gold paper round the cork, and labelled "sleeping-drops."

"I have it now," said Lucyan to himself; "at last I have my sleeping-drops."

He locked the cupboard again very carefully, and put the key in his pocket; and keeping the bottle in his hand, he held it to the light.

"Ten drops on sugar, nightly," was written on the label. Having read the directions, he turned the bottle round. The fluid it contained was of a deep yellow colour. Next he uncorked and smelt it. The smell was unusual and disagreeable.

"Did I say that the air was cold and sharp?" thought Lucyan; "no, it is hot and burning. I shall not have the porcelain stove lit now."

He stood with the uncorked bottle in his hand, hesitating as to what he should do. He put it down on the table at last, and walked to the door to listen; then walked to the window to see if he were not watched. No one was looking this way. Kazimir and Xenia still stood with their backs turned; and beside them Trappisto was still busy among the asters, and with earthy snout and mud-encrusted paws, was revelling in his favourite pursuit. Broken flowers lay around him.

"I wonder," reflected Lucyan, "whether Trappisto would like a lump of sugar!"

An idea had struck him, and he thought it was good. If there had been no "mistake" about the sleeping-drops, there would be no harm to Trappisto. And if there *had* been a mistake—why, Lucyan had hated the dog for long—at least then the blue asters would lose their persecutor, and there would be no more holes dug in the garden-beds. Ah, Trappisto! poor Trappisto! in your blessed ignorance, is it indeed your grave which you have been digging all summer?

"Trappisto! Trappisto!" called Lucyan, opening the window, and putting out his head.

It was the first time that Kazimir had heard his brother call to the dog, and, somewhat surprised, he looked round. Whenever Lucyan did take notice of Trappisto, the notice usually came in the shape of a kick, or of a hunt with a rake round the garden.

"What do you want, Lucyan?" he asked.

"I want your dog here for a minute, to clear a plate; send him in."

Trappisto was as surprised as his master; but whether the word "plate" conveyed some distinct impression to his mind, or whether there were other pleasant reminiscences connected with the dining-room, at any rate Trappisto abandoned the asters with alacrity, cleared a flower-bed, and leapt in by the open window.

There was a bowl of sugar standing on the dining-

table. Lucyan selected a large piece, and began to drop out the sleeping-draught. It was only now that he became aware of the excitement which governed him, for his hand was shaking, so that he had to pause. Upon each of his cheeks a scarlet spot flamed. He waited for a minute to recover himself, and then began to drop out the medicine again. This time he succeeded in steadying his hand.

"One, two, three," he counted up to ten; and all the time Trappisto stood in front of him and watched the process impatiently.

"Ten," said Lucyan; and he looked at the label once more, for he meant to give the medicine a fair trial. Then he laid the sugar on the floor, a yard from Trappisto's nose; he was always fastidious in his tastes, and he objected to letting his fingers come in contact with that moist and muddy snout.

Trappisto, although apparently somewhat mystified by the colour of the sugar, did not hesitate for long, but trotted forward, bent his head, glared at it greedily, and in the next moment it crunched between his teeth.

As he munched, the dog gazed up at Lucyan with a look of earnest gratitude, a sort of affectionate reverence, which he always felt towards any one who ever gave him anything to eat.

He stood in the same attitude after he had swal-

lowed the sugar for nearly a minute; then he gave a sort of shudder, and almost before Lucyan had time to notice any change, Trappisto staggered, and fell upon his side.

There was not a sound or a groan, only the convulsive tremble still ran over him as he lay. His legs stretched out slowly, his skin twitched once more, then seemed to stiffen in its wrinkles. He lay there stretched and quite motionless.

In less than a minute this had all passed. Lucyan still held the bottle in his hand, for he had never moved his eyes from Trappisto. He bent down now and looked at him, then touched him; then with two fastidious fingers lifted one of the yellow paws. It offered no resistance: the dog was quite dead already.

When he stood up straight again Lucyan's face was deadly pale.

"The sleeping-drops," he said, just above his breath —"my sleeping-drops." He held by the edge of the table to keep himself straight; for a blue film seemed slowly to be creeping over his eyes, and in this sudden fit of giddiness he could see neither the floor nor Trappisto.

Very slowly the giddiness passed, and his clearness of sight returned. The door had opened in the meantime, though he had not heard it, and Kazimir was standing in the room.

"Lucyan!" he cried,—"Lucyan, who has done this?"

"I did it," said Lucyan.

"This is cruelty, base cruelty," and Kazimir stooped over Trappisto. "You have taken a good deal from me, Lucyan," he added, between his teeth. "Do you not think you might have left me my dog?"

Kazimir's voice was low; but as he glanced up at Lucyan there was a dangerous light in his eye.

"I gave him my sleeping-drops," said Lucyan, speaking quietly, although the sickly pallor had not left his face.

"Your sleeping-drops!" echoed Kazimir, with a hard laugh, and he stood up and faced his brother. "And this is the work of your sleeping-drops? and that is why you look so pale? Does it surprise you, Lucyan, that it should have come to this at last? Does it not surprise you rather that it should not have come to this long ago?"

"Why?" asked Lucyan, slowly.

"Does it surprise you that you should have enemies?"

"Enemies?" Lucyan repeated the word suspiciously. "What do you know of my enemies?"

"More than of your friends. Have you a friend, Lucyan? Have you one single friend in all this wide world?"

"I don't know," said Lucyan, in a strange voice; he was gazing down at the bottle he held.

Kazimir had stepped up close to his brother now; his eyes flamed as he spoke.

"I am your brother, Lucyan, and most men have a friend in their brother, even if they have no other; but have you been a brother to me? I am not as clever as you, but I am clever enough to see that I have been duped by you all through life. By God! Lucyan, do you know that last night I was tempted to let you take the poison? I do not know what saved you: it was not any love of mine."

Lucyan knew what had saved him better than Kazimir—his brother's honesty; for it is a great mistake to suppose that because a man has no honesty himself, he must necessarily not know how to value it in others. It is only the villain on a small scale who does not dare to trust to his neighbour, because he knows that he is not to be trusted himself; and Lucyan was not a villain on a small scale. He did full justice to his brother's qualities; he recognised his largeness of heart and mind, his simple and straightforward nature. He even, to a certain extent, admired him as a figure of artistic merits, a piece of unpractical quixotry. He admired him, and—he pitied him. A grain of pity always flavoured his feelings towards Kazimir; but this sudden violence

startled him out of it. Just now he wished that Kazimir would not quarrel with him—he had enemies enough already.

But Kazimir's blood was up; the long restraint was burst at last. His reproaches poured hot and thick upon Lucyan.

"What you could take from me you have taken; I have nothing left now but the sword which I have gained for myself. You stole from me the woman I loved; and how have you used her? what have you made of her? Has one brother ever treated another as you have treated me? Oh, Lucyan, can such things indeed be done and go unpunished?"

Lucyan's eyes were on the floor; he listened with a face almost stupidly apathetic, only he could not meet Kazimir's fiery gaze. He was afraid of his elder brother to-day.

Kazimir paused and breathed deeply.

"I have spoken at last; I wish that I had spoken months ago. I hate myself for having come to your house and put on the face of a friend, when in my heart I felt the bitterness of an enemy."

"Why, then, did you not stay away?" asked Lucyan, with a faint, a very faint, reflection of one of his former sneers.

"You shall not ask me that again," cried Kazimir, impetuously. "This is my last visit. I shall not

trouble your house again, Lucyan,"—his fingers were on the door-handle.

"Wait," said Lucyan, and he put out his hand blindly, as if groping in the dark—he was afraid of letting Kazimir go away in anger—"wait," he said, smiling feebly; "we need not quarrel again, need we?"

It was too late now. Kazimir struck aside the hand which Lucyan held towards him, and, opening the door, he sprang from the room.

He was still so hot with anger that he could not be sure of the words he had said, nor feel certain whether, in his heat, he had not betrayed Janina's secret. In vain, as he rode homewards, did he put the question to himself.

But he need not have feared for Janina; it was not of Janina that Lucyan was thinking, as, left to himself, he began to pace the room. The short but stormy interview just passed had scarcely torn his mind from the train of thought which it had before been following. He seized back on it again at the very moment that the door fell shut.

The thought which shaped itself in Lucyan's mind was this: "The medicine was poisoned, *and it was Aitzig Majulik who brought the medicine to the house.*"

CHAPTER XVIII.

CARDS BETRAYED.

"Sir, he's a good dog, and a fair dog. Can there be more said? He is good and fair."—*The Merry Wives of Windsor.*

THERE was one more hole dug in the garden; but it was dug for Trappisto, and not by him.

The yellow dog was buried under a rose-bush. Lucyan made no objection—in fact, he believed that it was good for the bush; and Kazimir, once at home again, discovered that he was more than ever a lonely man. He missed the weak-minded wag of tail, and the mournful upward glance, to which he had been used so long: he turned away from the straw-mat by the stove as from a painful sight; every mark of a muddy paw on the boards served to lower his spirits. Trappisto had been an exceptionally quiet dog—and he had not been an exceptionally big one,—and yet the room had never looked so empty, nor appeared so silent, as it did to-night.

Next morning—his toilet being still incomplete—

Kazimir was startled by a violent altercation outside, and opening the door, found himself confronted by Aitzig Majulik, leading two dogs, each by a string, and attempting to force his way past the indignant soldier-servant.

"What do you want?" asked Kazimir, sternly.

"To wish a good morning to the noble captain," answered Aitzig, ducking his head.

"Leave me alone," said Kazimir; "do you hear?"

"Perfectly; Aitzig hears perfectly," said the factor, at the same time quietly making his way into the room, though the process was not free from difficulties, as the two dogs were pulling him in different directions.

"What is all this about?" inquired Kazimir, staring with an air of the most supreme disgust from the vulgar and rough-haired brown dog to the dazzling white poodle which Aitzig led. "Are you setting up a caravan, or do you think I am?"

Aitzig was vastly amused at the notion. The noble captain always did say such amusing things,—always was so witty and agreeable in conversation. Aitzig was truly grateful to see some cheerfulness remaining after so sad a loss; he had feared for the captain's spirits, &c., &c.

"What do you mean?" asked Kazimir.

"I mean the sad bereavement which the noble gentleman has suffered in losing his yellow dog."

"How do you know that?" asked Kazimir, sharply.

"Where is the thing that Aitzig does not know? and which is the thing that Aitzig could not do? Does the noble Pan think that Aitzig's head has lain on his pillow to-night?" He paused for a moment, with his hand uplifted and his body thrown back; but receiving no answer to the dramatically-put question, proceeded without one.

"No; Aitzig's head has scarcely touched his pillow. It was thus I spoke to myself: I said, the yellow dog is dead, the gracious captain is solitary; he will need a companion to replace the one he has lost. Before daylight I was up, and going from place to place; for I would bring to the noble captain none but dogs of the highest breeding and the most irreproachable conduct;" and here Aitzig, noticing that the largest and most vulgar of his charges was feasting upon a boot, quietly administered a warning kick. The poodle, being young, and not having yet acquired that perfect steadiness of legs which is indispensable to canine dignity, had sat down on the instant of entering the room, and lay on the floor like a heap of jeweller's cotton, evidently not intending to rise until compelled to do so.

Then, while Kazimir, half provoked and half amused, turned his back and went on shaving, Aitzig launched on a double panegyric concerning his two canine *pro-*

tégés, puffing out now one, now the other, with all the eloquence at his command. They were simple prodigies, and exceptional creations,—altogether different from any other animal that went by the name of dog. Would the gracious Pan be so kind as to say whether he had ever seen anything to approach the quality of that poodle's wool, or anything to rival the intelligence of his eye? He should be infinitely obliged if Kazimir would just name any other factor who was in the position to produce such a poodle. In fact, there was nothing to which he could fitly compare that poodle, unless it were the brown quadruped, which Aitzig dignified by the name of otter-hound.

"There is not an otter in the country," said Kazimir, savagely; "and if there were any I would not hunt them."

Ah! the noble captain preferred the poodle? Well, perhaps he was right. That was a dog that was at once companion and friend, protector, and almost counsellor. And to think that so much intelligence and good feeling—all that fidelity, and all that mass of jeweller's cotton—was to be purchased for five florins!

By this time Kazimir was feeling more provoked than amused. Had he been in his usual mood, he would have cut the matter short by turning the Jew and his dogs out of the door; but he was far from being in his usual spirits. "Leave me alone," he said,

wearily, and with a half sigh he sat down at the table, turning his back again to Aitzig.

Aitzig could not see his face; but he had heard the tone, and his fine and practised ear had caught the shade of sadness—the lonely expression of a solitary man. No matter that it was only the loss of a dog which had called it out; the expression was genuine, and Aitzig marked it.

Long ago his eyes had swept round the room, merely from the instinct of constant habit, and he had read every sign aright.

"I will stake my faith that the poodle would suit the noble captain," he began again, softly, after a minute. "Companionship is what the gracious Pan requires, and this poodle would afford more companionship than a whole regiment of comrades. Comrades? did I say comrades? Why, what wife, even, could be more devoted and faithful than this incomparable animal? And a man must have either a good wife or a good dog, noble Pan, if he is to live happily."

Kazimir made an impatient movement. A violent answer would have appeared much more hopeful to Aitzig Majulik. He would have shown resignation if Kazimir had abused him—he would have felt encouragement if Kazimir had expelled him. That would have looked like business at least. But this

silence and this apathy struck dismay to his heart; his flow of eloquence ran dry. Silent and irresolute, he stood and gazed at the floor, while the two dogs fell asleep by his side.

It might have been something in the attitude of Kazimir or the stamp of the room, or it might have been something in his own words, that put his busy mind on another train of thought. It was clear that Kazimir's heart was hardened against the charms of both poodle and otter-hound, and at the same time it was clear that he was oppressed by solitude. It went straight against all Aitzig's principles to leave the room without carrying with him at least the hope of a future bargain. He began to bethink himself of another cue.

It was some weeks now since, in his mental cupboard, he had locked away an article which lay there waiting for its chance in life. That chance he had almost despaired of finding; but had it not come now? Aitzig could see no better, at any rate. He had read Kazimir's state of mind far more accurately than Kazimir had read it himself, and he thought that the soil was ready for the seed. A man, generally, would not be likely to pay for the information that a penniless woman was in love with him; but Aitzig, with infinite scorn, told himself that this was just the sort of man who would marry a woman for no other reason but that she was poor and unhappy.

When he had coughed several times, and shuffled about for a minute, Aitzig spoke.

"The gracious Pan will not look at the dogs?"

"No," said Kazimir, shortly.

"And the gracious Pan will continue to live thus—alone?"

There was no answer.

Aitzig repeated his shuffle.

"It is a solitary life to lead, if Aitzig may venture to speak."

"What of that?" asked Kazimir, haughtily, struck by the significance of the factor's tone.

"The gracious Pan lives thus quite alone, without any one beside him; and the Pan is young, and handsome, and accomplished."

"And amiable, and good-tempered, and witty," finished Kazimir, beginning to lose patience; "and nothing else besides, are you sure? Do you think that is quite enough?"

It was not near enough, according to Aitzig's opinion; but refraining from a further list, he rapidly sidled in another observation. "Most men of that age think of marrying. Many is the lady, no doubt, who would be proud to call the gracious captain her husband."

"If you have nothing better to do than to sing my praises," said Kazimir, "you had better go."

But Aitzig had something better to do: he quickly leapt from generalities to particulars.

"If," he suggested—"if old Aitzig happened to have heard that there was somebody—that there was a lady who——"

"What are you saying?" Kazimir raised his head quickly.

"That there was a lady—attached to the noble captain—deeply attached."

"Silence!" said Kazimir, almost violently; for he instantly thought of Xenia. The blood mounted to his temples.

The Jew was puzzled. Had he guessed after all? Another step would show.

"A lady," he cautiously proceeded, "whose happiness the gracious Pan could complete to-morrow by making her his wife."

The flush on Kazimir's face began to fade. This could not be Xenia. His curiosity was aroused, and imprudently he put the question: "Who is it you are speaking of?"

Having led him skilfully thus far, and tempted him to betray curiosity, Aitzig as skilfully drew back. He raised his ten fingers in artless surprise.

The name of the lady? Was that what the gracious Pan desired? How could it be right of Aitzig to betray a lady's secret? But, on the other hand, if the

captain were really anxious, and especially if he did not mind going to the expense of some slight remuneration to Aitzig for his trouble, it might not be absolutely impossible to come to terms.

Aitzig's drift was clear by this time; and Kazimir's heart rose in disgust at the revolting bargain proposed. Watching his face carefully, the factor proceeded to make play with his ware, treating the broken heart just as if it had been a tangible object of traffic which he held in his hand. Now showing it through a cloud of mystery; now unveiling one corner temptingly; now turning up the broken edge for a moment and letting Kazimir catch a glimpse of how deep was the crack—for there is this difference between broken hearts and broken bottles, considered as objects of trade, that the depth of the crack lowers the one in value, while it heightens the other; and Aitzig, knowing his advantage, worked upon it. He kept nothing back except the mere name.

Kazimir rose at last in exasperation.

"Will you go, or shall I turn you out?" he asked, with frowning brow. "I will not listen to another word. I decline your horrid bargain. I do not want to buy your secret, nor do I believe that you have any to sell."

This last taunt was too cruel to be borne. By questioning his business capacity, Kazimir had touched

Aitzig's one tender point. In his eagerness to refute, the factor all but lost hold over himself. He uttered a sound, half shriek, half laugh, and wholly hysterical.

"How should Aitzig have no secret to sell, when it was these eyes that saw it and these ears that heard it? Did I not see her turn, after you had left her, and all in a minute break down and weep, holding the rock with her hand because she was too weak to stand alone? And Aitzig said, that is not the ruin; that is because her heart is brok——"

Before Aitzig had quite realised how much he had betrayed, he found himself in the passage outside, staggering against the wall, with the poodle and otter-hound rolling and howling in a knot at his feet.

Kazimir had saved his dignity, but it had been a narrow shave, after all; that haughty indifference, which sat so well upon him, was on the surface only, no deeper than a mask. He had not forgotten that evening among the rocks; he had not forgotten that look in Vizia's eyes which had so puzzled him then, and haunted him since with many a vague suspicion. He had wondered what the explanation of that look could be, and he had come so near to guessing the truth that it wanted nothing more than Aitzig's words to make the cloud fall from his eyes.

His own stupidity appalled him; how could he not have seen long ago what he saw so clearly now?

Yes, Vizia loved him; perhaps even had loved him for long,—and she was beggared. But so was he; he had no means wherewith to pay this debt of gratitude. In a few weeks more, the sword, which had hovered so long over her head, would fall. Her ruin had been virtually completed for some time; very soon its practical effects would come into force, and Vizia be for ever forced to leave Lodniki. She had been wronged, cheated, beggared by his brother, thought Kazimir,—and she loved him.

Thus Kazimir reflected, with his head upon his hand; and the morning sunbeams, slanting in, peeped over his shoulder, as though they would say, "What are your thoughts, you pensive man?"

CHAPTER XIX.

WHICH CARD?

"Vorwärts musst du, . .
Denn rückwarts kannst du nun nicht mehr."
—*Wallenstein:* SCHILLER.

"The spirits I have raised, abandon me;
The spells which I have studied, baffle me;
The remedy I recked of, tortured me."
—*Manfred:* BYRON.

HABIT blunts us to everything; and the rock-blasting at the end of the garden, which had at first excited interest, curiosity, or fear, according to the character of each household member, was now regarded by most with supreme indifference. They no longer felt nervous when the warning trumpet-note was sounded, and they no longer screamed when, five minutes later, the explosion was heard.

Xenia's peace alone remained disturbed. She had begun by feeling far more nervous at the trumpet-notes, and by screaming far louder at the explosions, than any one else; and now she would still have liked to shriek, and still have wished to indulge in

hysterics, only she did not dare. Her fear of her husband was even greater than her fear of gunpowder; and so, with a self-control she had never before practised, Xenia contented herself with thrusting her lace handkerchief between her teeth, or burying her head in the sofa-cushion.

Lucyan spoke little during these days; every one instinctively moved out of his path. His wife shrank from him in terror; the servants avoided their master. He seemed to notice no one. Never since his burst of fury, had he by a single word referred to the subject of the paper before Xenia; Lucyan never argued with his wife. But equally might it be said, that never for a single moment had his mind been free from the subject. It was of that he was thinking during the long hours that he silently and gloomily paced the room; it was of that he was thinking when he stood immovable by the window, staring with vacant eyes through the pane,—of that, and of the poison.

Those two things were inseparably linked together in his mind; the idea once shaped, he had never thought of disconnecting them. The problem of the poison had not puzzled him for long. From his brother he was safe, he felt, because of that brother's honesty—and from his wife, because of that wife's stupidity; he scarcely gave a thought to that side of the question: but there was a man who was neither

honest nor stupid, and that was the man he suspected. Nor should it be called by so weak a name as suspicion; from the very first moment it had been more. It was a conviction so overwhelming that it asked for no proof, and would admit of no doubt. Others might wonder; to Lucyan it all seemed hideously clear. It was what he had unconsciously expected, though he had not expected it to be so soon; it was merely the realisation and embodiment of all his vague apprehensions; it gave them sudden shape—it distinctly showed him what it was that he had indistinctly feared.

The consciousness he had long felt that Aitzig wished for his death, had become an irresistible belief which entirely swayed him. How was he to save himself? was the question on which he brooded. Every path of escape seemed closed. His mind, which had of late been so incessantly at work, refused to do more; strained and weary, it began to sink under the stress of thought.

If he delayed the payment of Aitzig's money, he could not be sure of his life for a day; but again, if Aitzig had long wished for his death, as Lucyan had now persuaded himself that Aitzig did, would not the moment of the payment, after which he had nothing more to hope from Lucyan, be a very proper moment, in Aitzig's eyes, for ridding himself of his master?

In a confused and fevered way, Lucyan almost thought so. He could not clearly see whether it were safer to withhold the money, or to pay it. And to add to his tortures, in the midst of this chaos, into which gradually he felt himself drawn, the agony of parting with the money lost none of its keen edge. Even to put his life in undoubted safety, he would still have hesitated.

All was closed around him; there was but one possible way by which everything would become straight at once—but one contingency which could give him back peace and comfort, and his lost self-confidence. Think and search as he might, it was always to this same point that Lucyan's mind returned, and round which his hopes tenaciously clung.

It was the image of Aitzig in his shroud, as he had seen him that afternoon. Frightful in itself, it was to Lucyan an image of peace and joy. If Aitzig were dead, he would be free; if Aitzig were dead, he might get back that fatal paper without exciting suspicion; Aitzig's death, and nothing but Aitzig's death, could save him.

It must not be supposed that Lucyan's temptations at this moment were the ordinary temptations of ordinary men. He felt no desire to stab or strangle Aitzig, though he would have rejoiced to see him stabbed or strangled. He was far too clever, even in

his present state of mental confusion, ever to become a vulgar murderer. However strong the motive, to kill a man would always remain a disagreeable undertaking. It was dirty work, it was ungentlemanlike, it was imprudent; it was a stupid thing to do. The victim was one particularly repulsive to the touch; the details of the act were revolting to a fastidious taste; even a spot of blood made Lucyan feel sick. No; there were plenty of grounds why Lucyan should not become a murderer: "C'est plus qu'un crime, c'est une faute," was the thought that held him back.

Perhaps the reason why the picture of Aitzig wrapped in his shroud remained so obstinately fixed in Lucyan's mind was, that he had last seen the Jew thus. Not for years past had such a long break occurred between the factor and the Wowasulka household. Except to bring the medicine, Aitzig had not been near the house this week. Lucyan had feared the persecution; but this absolute peace he feared still more. As long as Aitzig remained thus invisible, the danger would appear greater, because less palpable.

It was almost a relief when, a few days later, Lucyan, standing on the slope at the forest-edge, watching the workmen as they bored the rocks and laid the train, all at once caught sight of a familiar black figure on the road below.

"He is coming to me," said Lucyan; but Aitzig was

not coming. He kept on his way, without so much as raising his head, or looking up the slope.

"He is avoiding me," said Lucyan, with a thrill of deeper apprehension; "he wants to pass unnoticed:" and acting on something nearer an impulse than he had ever acted on in his life, Lucyan called—

"Aitzig!"

Aitzig looked up, and seeing Lucyan beckon, came up the slope; threading his way in rather gingerly fashion between the scattered rocks; casting mistrustful glances at the pickaxes and spades that lay about on the grass. He was mistrustful of the whole blasting process, as one of the few things that were strange and unfamiliar to him.

"The noble Pan desires?"

"Yes, I want to speak to you;" for Lucyan had come to a resolution. "I have remembered about that money transaction between us."

Aitzig, with his most winning leer, murmured that it was very gracious of the gentleman to remember so small a thing.

"I have not the money about me now; but to-morrow I shall pay you—half of the sum. Do you understand?"

"And the other half?"

"Another time." Lucyan, though he still partially retained the power of masking his inward agitation,

was scrutinising Aitzig with a long and piercing glance. His eyes hung upon the Jew with all the intensity of a lover gazing upon the beloved object. He had been conscious of a certain impatience to see again the man who, as he believed, had attempted his life. Coloured by his own belief, every sign he saw supported his conviction. He saw bloodthirstiness where there was only cunning; and in Aitzig's very attitude and expression, he thought he could read the suppressed rage of the murderer, who has been baffled for the moment.

He had scarcely strength enough remaining to restrain the outward expression of his disgust.

"Listen, Aitzig," he said, with a poor attempt at his once so perfect dissimulation; "there was a mistake about that paper which the Pani gave you. I want it returned."

"Naturally, naturally," said Aitzig, cringing. "It is quite natural that the noble Pan shall have the paper back."

"You may as well give it to me now." Lucyan held out his hand.

"It is quite natural," continued Aitzig, as though he had not heard, "that the paper shall be given back, —when the money is paid."

"The money is to be paid to-morrow."

"Half of it," suggested Aitzig.

Lucyan withdrew his hand; he saw it was of no use. He had not hoped to succeed, for he well knew "the stubborn nature of the Jew."

"You can go now," he said; "I shall see you to-morrow."

"At what hour does the gracious Pan command?"

"The same hour."

"Aitzig will be there punctually, at the house."

"Not the house," said Lucyan, quickly.

"Ah, Aitzig understands. Aitzig is not to be seen there. Which place, then, does the Pan desire?"

Lucyan hesitated for a moment, glancing irresolutely around him.

"The same place then," he said.

They had moved on some paces in talking, and they stood now beside a group of large rocks—the largest rocks on the slope. It was a convenient spot to choose, near to the house, and yet shielded from the windows, and veiled from the road by the branches of the garden trees. The workmen were employed some fifty paces off. A succession of dull and monotonous thuds sounded over from where they worked. Three men were raising and sinking the heavy borer which was to pierce the rock. There was no reason to fear their prying eyes; their eyes were perforce always chained to the spot they were boring; and besides,

they were but stupid Polish peasants, whose only merit lay in muscle.

"The same place?" repeated Aitzig, in a tone of dissatisfaction. "Does the gracious Pan think the place is safe?"

"Perfectly safe," said Lucyan. "Who could overhear us?"

Aitzig laughed. That was not what he meant; he was thinking of another sort of safety—of gunpowder, and flying stones, and exploding rocks. "Ah!" and Aitzig jumped a foot from the ground as another explosion rent the air. There was no cause for fear, however; they were out of shot—the last spent splinter of stone grazed a tree twenty paces off.

Lucyan gave a faint smile of contempt.

"Don't you know that they always sound a trumpet as soon as the train is fired? You cannot get your money to-morrow unless you wait for it here."

"Let it be so," said Aitzig, resigned. "Just here, then," and he looked round him. "Between those two big rocks it shall be."

The rocks he pointed at were those which Lucyan used jestingly to call his "twins." Taller than a tall man, they stood close together—but not so close as to forbid a narrow passage between them, which passage was blocked at one end. It was just the spot which children would have prized in a game of hide-and-

seek; but no children had played here within this generation.

The pair of twin giants which held such high rank in Lucyan's defunct rockery, and which, clothed in ivy and crowned with waving ferns, had been its chief ornament, presented a desolate spectacle now: only a few long trails still hung down the sides—the ferns lay trampled on the ground.

"Between those two rocks," said Aitzig again, and he nodded confidentially at the twins. It had been in the friendly shelter of those very rocks that he had cowered, while listening to Vizia and Kazimir, on the day of her ruin.

Aitzig went down the slope again, and Lucyan stood and watched him. When the black figure had vanished, Lucyan turned and walked towards the workmen.

The sun was low already, the men had fired their last train, and were gathering their pickaxes together.

"You are getting on fast, Monsieur Van Hoogen," said Lucyan, in French—(Lucyan never lost an opportunity of airing his French)—addressing a young man who was buttoning his coat preparatory to leaving the spot. "It looks almost as if you would be done to-morrow."

"*Pas demain,*" laughed the Belgian overseer, showing a cheerful double row of teeth. "We shall do but

a short day's work to-morrow; it is the eve of some festival, or some anniversary of some patron saint of the place, they tell me; and I must let them off their work two hours before the usual time, in order to make quite sure that they all have a fair chance of getting drunk."

"My poor rocks!" said Lucyan, with a mournful glance around him.

"Splendid material," said the Belgian; "the largest clump will go to-morrow, I hope," pointing in the direction where Lucyan had been standing some minutes ago. "I am almost sorry that I shall not be here to see them fly up. *Ce serait un plaisir!* But I shall have to inspect the line further down: they have got into a mess there—come to an awkward clay-cutting. Can do no more than see the trains laid; and, with their patron saint beckoning them to their confounded *eau de vie* shops, these fellows are pretty sure to cut and run as soon as my back is turned. Good evening, Monsieur Bielinski—*j'ai l'honneur de me congédier.*"

"*Bon soir,* Monsieur Van Hoogen." And so, with many polite grins on the part of Monsieur Van Hoogen, and various equally polite words on the part of both gentlemen, they went on their different ways.

CHAPTER XX.

THE LAST TRICK.

"I am afraid to think what I have done;
Look on't again I dare not."
—*Macbeth.*

LUCYAN'S first thought next morning was, "This is the day that I have to pay Aitzig half his money."

Aitzig's first thought was, "This is the day that I shall have half my money paid to me."

The workmen's first thought was, "Short work and deep *wódki;* blessed be our patron saint!"

The work, although short, was long enough to give Lucyan a headache,—for they were boring rocks again; and that dull, continuous succession of thuds put his overstrained nerves on the rack. He wished it would stop; and then he changed his mind, and wished it would go on,—for he remembered that, when the workmen were gone, Aitzig would come.

By four o'clock in the afternoon the slope was silent, and apparently deserted; no workmen were in

sight. There was no more reason for putting off the interview. If Aitzig had been punctual, he must already now be waiting between the two rocks—waiting for his three thousand florins.

Lucyan left the house reluctantly. Outside he paused; and, with a glance around to make sure that he was unobserved, he pulled out his pocket-book and gazed at the notes. The pain of parting with them had never been so keen. He felt a great repugnance to that spot among the rocks: slowly down the length of the garden he dragged his steps towards it.

The afternoon was so silent, and the air so clear, that even the rustle of a falling leaf was audible; and every step of Lucyan's on the gravel sent up a sharp, crisp echo. No cloud had streaked the pale-blue sky since morning; the sunshine lay still and golden over the slope. Autumn was in full glory. The year, which in its April youth loved primrose-wreaths and violet-scent, is in its second childhood now. The serious work of the summer is over; the orchards are ripened, and the harvests are garnered; the furnace of the sun has burnt the green leaves into gold; and now the old year is at play again, and finds its delight in flower-bells and the coral of red berries. There is a wealth of playthings all around. Shining spider-webs where the dew-drops have hung all day; velvet-winged butterflies, wonderfully streaked and spotted; thick-furred

caterpillars, crimson leaves, the rattle of the grasshopper in the grass,—these are the old-year toys; and, like a child at play, he blows about the feathers off the thistle-tops,—a mischievous game it is, to which many a sweating peasant will give his curse next summer.

The sunshine is making the most of the time that remains; there will not be many more days of this sort before the winter comes. For all this boastful display, and this flood of golden beams, the rule of the sun is waning fast. This very morning Queen Frost has paid a flying visit to the world: her footsteps are still on the garden-beds, where she stole over them in the silent dawn, when mankind was still asleep; her finger-marks are on more than one October rose, that hangs its languid head, carrying death in its heart. The rising sun scared the frosty queen away; for when the first fiery arrow shot over the horizon, she fled from the earth in haste; but she dropped her veil in flying. Early risers could see it still lying over the grass.

Now she creeps out like a thief in the night; but soon she will come in the broad daylight, unmasked and undisguised. Already the plants are beginning to droop and fade; the ivy alone, that still lingers at places among the yet unblasted rocks, is only now bursting into late flower, looking its very gayest and most festive,—almost, thought Lucyan, as though it revelled in the havoc that is coming.

At that moment Lucyan stopped short,—for his eye was caught by a small object lying on a rock. It was a horn-trumpet,—the same, no doubt, used by the workmen for signalling that the train was fired. Though he had become familiar with its tone, Lucyan had never happened to see the instrument before. He stopped and looked at it now; and as he stood looking at it, he remembered that Monsieur Van Hoogen had told him that the big rocks were to be blasted to-day.

He looked at the trumpet a minute longer; then he looked to both sides of him; then he took up the trumpet, turned it over, remarked that the horn was cracked at one place, and finally put it in his pocket.

It was scarcely in his pocket when he perceived two workmen approaching. They were looking about them, kicking the stones, probing the grass with the handles of their pickaxes. Lucyan understood at once what it was they were looking for.

"You have lost something?" he said, as they came stumbling on, without noticing him.

The men looked up, removed their caps, and scratched their heads. Yes, they had lost something,—the trumpet for signalling,—but it was not their fault; at least each of them was quite sure that it was not *his* fault, and equally sure that it was the other's fault.

"Ah, the trumpet! Big and yellow, was it not?"

"No, it was small and brown," they said.

"But what do you want the trumpet for to-day?" asked Lucyan; "I thought you had left off working?"

The others had left off working, explained the men, pausing for a minute to listen to the far-off sound of a jovial chorus, sung by their retreating comrades; but Monsieur Van Hoogen had left strict orders that a portion of those rocks was to be gone before to-morrow. The train was laid; there was nothing to do but to fire it and sound the trumpet.

"And what would Monsieur Van Hoogen do if you fired it without sounding the trumpet?" asked Lucyan.

The men looked at each other dubiously. They were not quite clear as to Monsieur Van Hoogen's course of action in such a case; for besides being choleric, he had odd notions about safety and the value of human life — notions that were not at all Polish.

Lucyan suggested that Monsieur Van Hoogen had no means of knowing whether the trumpet had been sounded or not.

That was true, the men agreed; the Pan was quite right. But, as the more conscientious of the two feebly observed, there had been some one among the rocks a little time ago, and they had not seen him go away.

"He must have gone long ago," said Lucyan.

That also was true, the men agreed again. They

were only too ready to let themselves be convinced that to go off and join their rollicking companions was the best, the wisest, and the safest thing to do. Lucyan uttered no word of persuasion; but in two minutes' time the workmen were doing exactly what he intended that they should do. If they lit the train at once without further search for the trumpet, they could still overtake their comrades. Of course, in that case they could not wait for the explosion; for the train would take seven or eight minutes to reach the gunpowder. But, after all, that was not of much consequence. Would the Pan Marszalek stand here, just on this spot, where he would be quite in safety?

When the workmen had left him, Lucyan looked at his watch. Seven or eight minutes they had said; and all the future had become reduced for him to these seven or eight minutes before him. At what precise moment the idea had entered his head he could not have traced had he wished. He only knew that it was there. It might have been at the moment when he saw the trumpet lying on the rock, or it might have been when the workmen spoke to him. He had laid down no plan; the plan had laid itself.

He stood leaning against a tree-stem waiting; and as he waited, he was not aware of any trepidation or

hesitation in his purpose. He was aware only of the terrible slowness with which the minutes were passing. His mind was scarcely at work; all his senses seemed blunted. In a dull stupid sort of fashion he began to wonder whether Aitzig really were among those rocks. There were at least as many chances on the one side as on the other. He might have been detained at home; he might have taken fright when they lit the train at the other side of the rock, even though the trumpet-note was not given. True, the rock was thick and would deaden all sound; but the chance was there all the same.

Once or twice while he waited, Lucyan put his hands to his ears and covered them, as if dreading the burst of the explosion; but it was not dread that he felt,—it was rather an ever-growing longing. The silence of the autumn day was becoming intolerable.

There was a large brown caterpillar crawling in the grass at his feet. Lucyan watched it with a curious attention; he wondered whether it would reach the tree before the train was burnt. It was strange to think that by merely standing thus with his arms folded, watching the caterpillar crawl, he was killing Aitzig all the time. The notion was original, whimsical, humorous, fascinating.

There was a bird singing on a tree at the forest-edge. Lucyan listened, and wondered whether Aitzig

were listening too? and whether the bird's song would be the last sound Aitzig was to hear in his life?

The caterpillar crawled on through the grass, slowly drawing near to the tree; and the spark which Lucyan could not see was burning slowly towards the rock; and all the time the bird's song continued, and Lucyan felt as though this would never end.

When he looked at his watch he saw that just six minutes were passed. Putting back the watch he drew out the trumpet. Up to this moment every one of his movements had been mechanical. He had got accustomed to the idea, as to a fact already accomplished. As he held the trumpet in his hand, it flashed upon him that nothing need be accomplished unless he chose. The trumpet was at his lips; but though he held it there some seconds, there came no sound. It might have been want of breath that checked him, or it might have been want of courage, or it might as well have been that he did not lack courage.

It was still at his lips when a low dull sound which he knew well grew upon his ear. The rumble swelled slowly to a loud report; the rock heaved, and, bursting, flew to fragments. There was a cloud of smoke, a veil of sand, and a shower of small stones. It was all over.

A sense of relief came over Lucyan—of sudden, of immense relief; one way or the other the matter was settled. The trumpet dropped from his fingers to the grass as he stood gazing steadily up the slope.

The aspect of the spot was changed, but not as much as he had expected; for it was the furthest of the two rocks that had fallen—the nearest one stood upright still. Shattered blocks lay on the grass, and on them the dust and smoke were slowly settling down again. The silence was once more complete. There had been no shriek, no other sound beyond the explosion. The idea of Aitzig being dead came upon Lucyan suddenly as a complete improbability. He looked round him. The road was empty; there was not a human being within sight.

Curiosity had taken entire possession of him; he wanted to know whether Aitzig were up there or not, and slowly he began to ascend the slope.

Small curls of blue smoke floated towards him; the smell of gunpowder made him feel faint, and his steps grew slow and heavy. The nearer that he approached the spot, the more improbable did Aitzig's death appear. Aitzig might at this moment be sitting at the Propinacya peacefully watering his *wódki*.

The ground around the rock was rough with sharp corners of stone. The now lonely twin stood mournful

but intact, staring down in stony surprise at the fragments of its shivered companion.

Lucyan skirted it, and, coming round the corner, he saw at a few paces a man lying stretched with his face to the ground.

That the man was a Jew, the *kaftan*, rent and torn, told him; and that this Jew was Aitzig Majulik, he needed no *kaftan* to tell him.

"Dead!" said Lucyan aloud, for there was no one to hear him.

The rock alongside seemed to nod in melancholy agreement.

That one word broke the silence painfully. Even the humming insects seemed to pause, and the bird had not resumed its song.

The attitude of the prostrate figure was that of a dead man; but Aitzig's face was hidden in the grass, and Lucyan felt simultaneously a great repugnance and a great desire to see that hidden face.

He made a step forward, then drew back again, shuddering, but never taking his eyes off the man on the ground.

"Dead! yes, surely dead!" he whispered; but no answering nod came from the rock this time.

To Lucyan, it seemed as if it were shaking its stony head in reply; and before he had time to ask himself

what it meant, the whole block of stone had tottered, and, slipping forward, was slowly falling upon him.

The shock of concussion had loosened its hold, or perhaps the destruction of its brother had broken its granite heart; and refusing to survive for even one day, the solitary twin had sought its own end.

CHAPTER XXI.

COUNTING THE TRICKS.

"Can no one hear? It is a perilous tale."
—COLERIDGE.

THE rock had been wrong when it nodded, and right when it shook its head; for Aitzig Majulik was not dead. He was crushed, mangled, and disfigured, but the breath was still in his body. "He will die before nightfall," the people said; and they said the same for many days afterwards; but many nights fell, and four weeks passed, and Aitzig still lingered.

Four weeks had been enough to blunt the first edge of excitement, curiosity, and wonder which the accident, resulting in the death of the master of Wowasulka, had awakened. The inquiry and examination of the workmen had led to no other conclusion than that it had been an unfortunate chance, coupled with some negligence.

Lucyan had been buried with much pomp, but little

grief; with many wax-candles, but few tears. His fate was scarcely to be called a very cruel one, for he had been spared the agony of death. Death had made a clean stroke of it here,—had killed him at one blow; he could hardly have had time to understand that the rock was falling on him.

The neighbourhood had got used to Xenia's black crape, and to Janina's; for Janina now openly signed herself by the name of Bielinska, and the little Marcin, who had lately made his appearance in the world, and for whom Janina had immediately bought the very noisiest rattle that could be found in all Tarajow, was universally acknowledged as the dead Marcin's legal son. No very positive proof of the marriage was forthcoming, but Kazimir said that she had been his brother Marcin's wife: and the same neighbourhood that had once coldly patronised the prodigal, now bowed to the decision of the master of Wowasulka. Lucyan's will ascribing his fortune to his only child Wanda, now dead, Kazimir became heir-at-law. The sixth part was all to which the widow was entitled; but Kazimir had shown himself more than generous in restoring to her her personal fortune. As yet he had made no change in his own life, and curiosity still remained unsatisfied as to what his future was to be. Wowasulka was inhabited only by the widow, and now by Vizia, who had indeed no other home.

His communication with the two women had been slight of late; but one day a pink scented note was brought to him, requesting his immediate presence.

The road was deep with mud, for the fine weather had broken a fortnight ago; and rain—grey, persistent, and pitiless rain—had been falling ever since.

To reach Wowasulka, Kazimir had to pass by the Propinacya buildings; and here, to his surprise, he found the road blocked with men who stood in groups, regardless of the rain, and evidently labouring under some excitement, though few of them raised their voices above a whisper, and most of them stood silent. The men were all Jews, Kazimir perceived, and their eyes were all fixed in one direction,—towards the closed door of the Propinacya.

Just as Kazimir was passing, the door opened, and a small *kaftan*-clad figure rushed out, and straight towards Kazimir it darted through the crowd.

"Gracious Pan! noble Master!" shouted the little Jew, "the God of Abraham has sent you."

"Come nearer," said Kazimir,—"I do not understand you;" for the miniature Hebrew, whose long robe, tiny skull-cap, and diminutively snaky curls, presented a most perfect copy of his elders, had come to a standstill, and was looking apprehensively at the horse's heels. He again shrieked out something, incomprehensible to Kazimir.

Kazimir, turning to a group of older Jews, inquired the reason of this disturbance.

"Aitzig Majulik is lying at the point of death," said one.

"And we are waiting here to pray for his soul," said another. "The wise man has said that he cannot last till evening."

"And he has been calling for you all night," said a third. "Listen! you can hear it now!" and in the silence which followed, Kazimir could distinctly hear the voice of a man in delirium calling out his name.

"Pan Bielinski! Pan Bielinski!" it screamed. "I have to speak to the Pan Bielinski, to the master of Wowasulka. Will no one call him? Will no one call him?"—and the rest was deadened by the thickness of the wall.

Kazimir sprang from his horse.

Immediately there rose a murmur in the crowd. On all sides the Jews pressed forward towards him.

"Let me pass," said Kazimir; "I mean to go to him."

"You cannot, you cannot!" they cried all round him. "Your foot may not cross the threshold of his house. Would you weigh down his soul at the moment of flight? Would you bring him back to earth whom Jehovah calls to heaven? The Angel of Death stands at the door; you cannot pass!'

And the Jews, in their excitement, pressed close around him; and some held him back by his cloak, and others put themselves between him and the door; while the wildest amongst them tore at their curls in rage, and dancing about furiously in the mud, screamed at the pitch of their voices, "Wai! Wai! the Gentile must not pass; he must not pass!"

"Make way, cowards!" he said, shaking off on either side some half-dozen of dirty hands; and as his riding-whip was stout and his mien determined, the Jews danced out of his way; and, pursued by a chorus of furious yells, Kazimir entered the house.

With trembling fingers the little Hebrew bolted and locked the door behind them; and then drew Kazimir forward along a pitch-dark corkscrew passage.

The same voice which he had heard through the wall met his ears here, louder and more plaintive, growing more distinct with every step along the passage. Through the opening door it burst at last upon him like the grating of some ill-tuned instrument, for the poor wretch was hoarse with calling. And through it all there ran an undercurrent of nasal recitation, which never fluctuated in tone, however shrill might grow the cries of the man in delirium.

The room was square, low, and close to suffocation. Over each window there hung some piece of black

stuff—on one a ragged shawl, on the other a threadbare blanket—shutting out the light from the lower panes. There were at least seven beds in the room, all ranged along the walls, and all heaped with feather-pillows, whose embroidered stripes showed in strange contrast to the dirt and dust around. Every bed was of a different shape and height, as was also every chair in the room; for they had each been picked up as the occasion offered, and there was not one of them which had not been bought a bargain.

In a further corner, a mass of old iron made a rusty hillock,—a sack bursting with goose-feathers lay alongside; above it there hung two thick plaits of fair hair, which, only a week ago, had still wreathed the head of some peasant-beauty. There were jugs too on the table, and bottles, and a mingled smell of *wódki* and garlic pervading the room. The door of a closet in the wall stood ajar, just wide enough to afford a glimpse of a broken bird-cage, and of a saddle on which the leather hung down in rags. Smaller objects, such as old tooth-brushes, single ear-rings, and pocket-combs, occupied a higher shelf to themselves.

Several people were in the room, although, in the half darkness, Kazimir could not at once distinguish them all. A youth was laying straw in the centre of the floor; some paces further, a man sat crouching on his heels beside one of the beds; and on that bed

there lay Aitzig Majulik, supported in the arms of his wife.

The woman's feet were slipshod, and her petticoat patched; she wore a dirty cotton bedgown, a ragged neck-handkerchief, a greasy satin wig, and a coronet of pearls and diamonds, which might have graced a crowned head. There had been a time when the teeth of Aitzig's wife had been as white as those pearls, and her eyes as bright as the diamonds that shone among them: now the jewels only served to set off the wrinkles of her withered cheek, and the sharp lines of her haggard features. They made a dazzling frame to her ugliness; for the teeth that remained to her were yellow, and the eyes sunken and dull, showing no lustre either of tenderness, pity, or grief, as she held up her dying husband in her arms.

As Kazimir entered, the shrill cries dropped suddenly; and when he approached the bed, Aitzig lay quite silent, and stared at him blankly.

"You called me," said Kazimir—"here I am."

Aitzig examined him with anxiety, a puzzled frown upon his face.

"I want the master of Wowasulka; you are not the master of Wowasulka."

"There is no other now."

"I wish you were the master of Wowasulka," said Aitzig, in a whisper so feeble that Kazimir could

hardly catch it; "you would not have treated a poor man as the other did. Oh cruel, cruel, world!"

"He has been wandering since yesterday," observed the wife, in a mechanical tone.

Aitzig lay and stared at Kazimir, as if struggling to get at some conclusion. Suddenly he seemed to have reached it; he clutched at Kazimir's arm.

"The paper," he whispered—"the paper; you have got it for me? you have brought it to me? where is it?"

"What paper? I know of no paper."

"The voucher for the six thousand florins; the railway money. Ah, my memory is good: you wanted me to give it back; but no, no, no, Aitzig is no fool,"—a shade of senseless cunning passed over his white face, —"only now they have stolen it; they could not find it in my *kaftan;* it is lost—lost; but you have brought it back?" and eagerly he stretched a shaking hand towards Kazimir.

"I know of no paper," said Kazimir again.

The sick man gazed at him long and piercingly, then dropped his hand, and turned deliberately round in his bed, away from Kazimir.

"Oh, I forgot," he said, with a weary sigh; "it was the other brother."

For several minutes he did not move, and the nasal invocations of the crouching Jew beside the bed were

the only sound in the room. The silence was so long that the old Jewess bent over him scrutinisingly, and then inquired of her grandson whether the candlestick were ready, and the sheet, and directed him to take the cracked mirror from the wall; for it is bad luck to see two corpses in the room, instead of one.

Outside also, the silence had been noticed; the professional mourners began to give a few preliminary howls, as though to get their voices into training for the labour that awaited them.

The howls aroused Aitzig; he moved again in his bed, and this time there was a return of intelligence in his eye. It alighted first upon his eldest grandson.

"Mind, Simche," he said, almost in his usual voice, "the feathers are not to be given under eight thirty-five; the soft ones at the mouth of the sack, the stiff ones below."

Then his eye travelled on towards Kazimir.

"Your brother is dead," he began abruptly. "Do you mourn for him?"

"Why should I not?" said Kazimir, evasively.

Aitzig shook his head. "You should not mourn for him. What was he to you when he lived? A false friend, a false brother, a traitor."

"Hush," said Kazimir, quickly.

The crouching Jew broke off his recitation, and sat down to rest upon a bundle of old coats; for Aitzig

was not dying as quickly as he had expected, and his joints were cramped by the hard boards.

"Hush," said Kazimir. "What can you know about it?"

"What should Aitzig not know? Aitzig was his right hand; without Aitzig he could have done nothing of what he did. I worked his plans; I knew his secrets. Ah, secrets are good things!" cried Aitzig, in feverish excitement — "for secrets bring money; everything is good that brings money. The stinking grease brings the chinking gold, they say. Tell me, Pan Kapitan, will you pay me for the secret? for all the secrets? How much gold will you give to old Aitzig if he tells you the lady's name?" His mind was beginning to wander again.

"Is the straw laid ready?" asked the wife, in a dry whisper.

Kazimir looked at her inquiringly.

"They die more easily on the ground," she explained, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"No—no—no!" cried Aitzig, "not yet the straw. I cannot die without the paper. I must have the six thousand florins. Noble Pan, give me the paper; why will you not give the paper to poor old Aitzig?" and he began to whimper like a child.

The watching Jew, leaving his bundle, crouched down again on his heels, and resumed his recitation;

and the door slowly opening, there poured in a stream of black figures, all whispering as they began to move about the room, making their noiseless preparations. One trimmed the wax-candle which was to burn at the head of the dead man, but did not light it yet, for that would have been waste. Another put together on the threshold all vessels containing water, ready to be emptied out on the road when the Angel of Death, in passing, should have dipped his fingers in it; for the water then smells of human blood. Another busied himself in taking from the wall the many-striped, many-coloured bag, containing the black and silver scarf, which had been the proudest acquisition of Aitzig's life.

And every Jew as he came in passed his hand over a parchment-tablet in the wall beside the door-post, and kissed the fingers which had touched the parchment;[1] and all of them, as they moved about, or stood in a circle round the bed, cast gloomy and threatening glances towards the intruder, whose unhallowed presence was sacrilegiously disturbing the last hour of this child of Israel.

"You should be commending your soul to your forefathers," they said to the sick man, "instead of wasting your minutes in godless parley with a Christian."

[1] The universal prayer of the Jews, called "Sadaj," which signifies Almighty.

"Your hour of glory is coming," said another. "Before sunset you will rest in the bosom of Abraham;" and he held out the silver-striped shroud, shaking it into tempting folds before Aitzig's eyes. But Aitzig shivered convulsively and turned away; the silver scarf had no charms for him just now.

"O, my God," he murmured after the others, "the soul Thou hast given me is pure. Thou hast created it in me, and Thou hast breathed it into me, and Thou watchest over it in the midst of me——" He broke off with a groan, then opened his eyes again. "Simche," he whispered to his grandson, "remember the big jar of *wódki* is not to be sold till it has been mixed. Am I dying now? I wonder who it was that killed me? There were the workmen, and the sun shone, and there was a noise like thunder when I stood between the rocks. I don't remember the rest. Who killed me? Was it you?" and he turned his head again towards Kazimir.

Kazimir stood silent; and for a minute Aitzig lay silent also, apparently collecting the last remnants of his mental powers. When he spoke again he had regained a momentary clearness.

"Pan Kapitan, do you remember how you gave up your rights four years ago?—all your rights to Wowasulka?"

"I remember," said Kazimir.

"And how you got a paper which spoke of the Propinacya and the lease?"

"Yes, yes," said Kazimir; "what of it?"

"I wrote that lease, Pan Kapitan. It was signed by my name; but that paper—that paper—hush!"—he checked himself—"there are too many people listening. Bend over me; I will whisper it."

Kazimir bent down to listen: but the face on the pillow was convulsed by a sharp spasm; a sort of shuddering moan burst from the withered lips.

"The fit is coming on again," said the woman; "he cannot speak while it lasts."

"I must go now," said Kazimir, stepping back, and the black figures all round nodded approvingly: but Aitzig caught him by the cloak.

"Pan Kapitan, Pan Kapitan," he panted, though twisting in pain, "you must come back. I shall not die yet; I cannot die, you know, till I have my money;" and the cold drops stood on his forehead. "I have a secret to tell you—one of your brother's secrets. You will pay me for it. Say you will come back. Promise!"

"Do these fits last long?" asked Kazimir, turning to the wife.

"An hour or more," she answered, shortly.

"I shall come back in an hour, Aitzig."

"Promise," said the sick man again.

"I promise."

The grasp of the fingers relaxed. "Yes," he groaned, with a painful effort, "I shall wait for you here at this place—the same place, but not between the rocks —no, no, no—not between the rocks;" and the wildness returned to his eye.

The black circle around the bed opened readily to let Kazimir pass.

"Lay him on the straw; it is time," Kazimir heard them say, as he reached the door; but in the midst of his convulsion Aitzig found strength to shriek—

"Not yet—not yet the straw!"

They were lifting him out by the time Kazimir had regained the air, and he could still hear how the poor wretch was shrieking, "Not yet, not yet! I cannot die yet!" but the screams were drowned in a nasal chorus of prayer.

The game of Aitzig's life was fast drawing to a close. This knave was to take no more tricks at the card-table of the world. But there are plenty other knaves ready to step into his place. The game never stops for want of proper cards, nor of players either. For does not every one of us figure at that card-table, sometimes as card, sometimes as player? And is not life very like a game at which we each have to take our turn, where we each try to get the better of the

other, and where some must of necessity lose, in order that others may gain? To be sure, we can never quite know who is gainer and who is loser until the end is reached and the points are scored; and points such as these can be scored only on deathbeds.

Aitzig's game is wellnigh played out, as Lucyan's is entirely; but not so Kazimir's, nor some others yet. The game will go on after my curtain is dropped, just as it had begun before it ever was raised. I have done no more than show a few turns.

I have still a few more turns to show; for there are cards which might yet be paired off before this round is closed.

Was there not a pink note in Kazimir's pocket summoning him to an interview at Wowasulka?

CHAPTER XXII.

KAZIMIR REVOKES.

"War sie der Flamme nicht werth, die so feurig Geliebte, verzeih ihr!"
—BRINKMANN.

"THIS way," said the barefooted servant-girl to Kazimir. "Not that door, Pan Kapitan,—this one." It was the drawing-room door which Kazimir had been opening, and the room to which she pointed was Xenia's bedroom.

There was a grin on the girl's stupid face as she held back the door for him; and feeling vaguely uneasy as to the meaning of the grin, and somewhat surprised at being admitted into this sanctuary, Kazimir, almost timidly, stepped over the threshold.

It seemed to him that he was stepping right into a rare plant-house—so hot was the air, and so heavily scented with rich perfumes, mingling their sweet breath in an almost overpowering fragrance—patchouli, wood-violet, and new-mown hay, were all contending for the

upper hand, and with them was struggling another—and here unusual odour,—nothing less than the smell of tobacco.

But it was a most delicate and tender tobacco: it curled in a faint blue wreath from a fragile cigarette, and the cigarette was held between Xenia's fingers, as she reclined on a sofa, with her widow's weeds flowing around her.

And such widow's weeds they were! Not a fault could have been pointed by the sternest moralist. The mourning was as deep as the most iron etiquette could demand; and yet in its very depth Xenia had found means to mirror her beauty. Every touch served to set it off—from the broad white band encircling the skirt, with which Polish custom marks the nearest loss, to the coquettishly *chiffonné* morsel of crape which Xenia called her widow's cap, but which looked more like a big black butterfly settling by mistake on the side of her chestnut head.

"I hope you do not mind my receiving you here—in this way"—said Xenia, looking down first at herself and then upwards at Kazimir, confidently, for an answer. "You know how wretchedly ill I have been lately; I am quite unable to dress properly." Her attire was a flowing dressing-gown, gathered by a black cord into loose folds at the slender waist. The sleeves were wide and hanging; and Xenia, as she spoke, gave

a little graceful pull to one of them, as if all at once distressed at the amount of white arm displayed.

"You might have come to see me sooner, Kazimir," she said, reproachfully; "you need not have waited for my note."

"I should have come soon, at any rate," said Kazimir; "for you have heard of the change, of course?"

"About the regiment marching?"

"Yes."

"What has that to do with it?" said Xenia, lightly.

"Only that I meant to say good-bye."

"Good-bye!" She repeated the word with another laugh, as if nothing so exquisitely amusing as this word good-bye had ever been heard. "You make me laugh, Kazimir; you talk as if there really were any reason for saying good-bye."

"I hardly understand——" began Kazimir; but Xenia, who all this time had been drawing persistent though timid puffs from her cigarette, began to cough with some violence.

"You never used to smoke before," said Kazimir, as she regained her breath.

"Because Lucyan never would let me. There are so many things which Lucyan would never let me do; I have never known liberty before. Don't you find that the room looks quite changed?"

Kazimir had noticed already that the room was changed,—not exactly in any prominent feature, but in a host of minute details.

It was on Xenia's toilet-table that were now ranged those numerous scent-bottles and cut-glass phials which Lucyan had always kept for his own exclusive use. The porcelain stove, which in Lucyan's time had been fed but sparingly, was now crammed to bursting, and glowing to an intolerable degree. The gardening books which once filled the shelves, were now piled in a corner on the floor, with the exception of the well-worn 'Hints to the Rose-Lover,' which, from its shape, had been found a convenient block for winding some black lace flounces that required smoothing.

Kazimir had not loved his brother, and yet these signs in the room pained him. They were not enough to make him regret Lucyan, but they were enough to make him again regret that their last words had been so bitter.

"Last night," said Xenia, "I was so frightened by a dream. I dreamt that Lucyan was alive again, and walked into the room softly, just as he used to do, and found me using his wood-violet scent. I think I screamed, and that awoke me; and it was such a relief to see that his bed was empty."

She paused, twirling the cigarette between her

fingers, and watching Kazimir from under her eyelashes. He was rather stupid to-day, she thought, and slow to take the hints she had given him.

"That is why I sent for you," she added aloud.

Kazimir certainly was very stupid to-day; apparently he could see no connection between Xenia's dream and Xenia's message.

"You are dropping ashes on your dress," he prosaically remarked.

Xenia brushed them off, with a pout on her lips.

"I don't think you are getting on very well with that cigarette. Do you really care for smoking?"

"Oh, very much," said Xenia, blinking her eyes in the smoke. "So many women smoke, you know; don't all officers' wives smoke?"

"Some of them do."

"The pretty widow smoked, did she not?"

"Yes."

Xenia smiled, and threw another expectant glance at Kazimir.

"And now I am a widow too."

Clearly it was his part to put in the word "pretty," which she had omitted.

His silence provoked her—it scarcely alarmed her yet.

"Do you object to women smoking?"

"No, not particularly."

"If—if you think,—if—if you wish it, I will stop," said Xenia, most sincerely; for in truth she was choked and parched, and longing for an excuse to get rid of her cigarette.

Kazimir disclaimed any such wish.

She tossed her head in a way which made the crape-butterfly give a sort of flutter in her hair; but the cigarette was laid aside.

"I have made no changes yet in any of the other rooms," she said; "but we shall have to get new furniture in the drawing-room; don't you think so?"

"I have not thought about it," said Kazimir, starting at something in her phrase.

"Of course you will have to decide." She looked at him with a charmingly submissive glance. "You must choose it yourself; what is your favourite colour?"

"Black," said Kazimir, rather grimly.

"How absurd of you!" She looked down at her black dress, shook up her rattling black bracelets, and blushed a little at the supposed compliment. "But it would never do to have black furniture, you know; I think blue would be best. I never dared to ask Lucyan for blue furniture; and—oh yes, I have had all the flower-pots taken away; you never liked flowers, you know, and you were always knocking them down."

Kazimir's face had suddenly become very grave. "There is no need to consult me," he said, slowly; "I am going away."

"But you are coming back again?"

He was silent.

"When are you coming back again?" Her voice betrayed the slightest possible tremor; the first chord of alarm had been touched within her.

"When are you coming back?"

"I do not know."

"But it will be soon,—very soon? In a few weeks? in a few months? before the end of this year?"

"No, Xenia; I do not think it will be this year."

She began to get frightened, although still half incredulous. Every word hitherto had been but a sort of light skirmishing: she had played and coquetted with her meaning—had been a little piqued at his slowness to seize the prize offered — but had been unable to realise that there could be any positive hesitation in the grasping of that prize. She did not quite realise it yet; only the grave expression of his face awoke in her a sort of nameless panic.

"Kazimir!" she broke out, "it is you who should be speaking now, not I. Will you say nothing to me?"

"I will say good-bye," he answered, very low.

Xenia made an attempt to laugh it off; but she was

half sitting up on the sofa now, and, with her bare arms on the table, was gazing at him anxiously.

"Do not look so grave, Kazimir—you frighten me: tell me that you are happy. Just think how long we have waited for this moment. I thought that I should be quite old and grey by the time it came." There was a mirror hanging straight opposite the sofa, and instinctively Xenia's eyes travelled towards it. Her courage revived, and with it her coquetry. "You have been trying to frighten me, Kazimir,—have you not? Look at me, Kazimir!"

Kazimir looked. He saw a beautiful woman, with unabashed eyes, and pettishly parted lips. He marked the coquettish *pose:* the bare arms, now fully displayed; the carefully exposed foot; the hand, which played with the curl. He knew that every one of these touches was calculated to work upon him,—and he wondered a little at his own indifference. Why was he so cold? He knew, and had known for some time past, that he had gained her love—what love she had to give. Why did his heart not bound? Not one of these signs had power to move him. He was conscious only of an oppression which made him long to leave her presence. He rose abruptly, and walked to the window. Xenia got up and followed him.

"You loved me all the time, Kazimir,—did you not?

I know you did. It must have been a dreadful time for you. Do you understand me now? Do you not understand yet?"

Still he stood beside her, silent, and apparently unmoved.

"Oh, Kazimir, how stupid you are to-day! Do you not see? You are to be made happy!"

"That cannot be," said Kazimir, below his breath.

She thought he still doubted his own happiness, as too great.

"But it really can be," she said, with a flippant laugh. "Lucyan is dead, and you have deserved your reward; you have loved me so long; and you love me as much as ever, do you not? Lucyan always used to say so."

Kazimir's face was averted, and his features were working now.

"Kazimir!" she cried, with an hysterical scream; "you must love me still! You cannot, you cannot be faithless!"

"As you once were to me," thought Kazimir; but he kept down the words.

"I know what it is,"—and Xenia burst into a flood of tears,—"you do not think me pretty any more; you think I have lost my looks. But it is not true—it really is not true; it was only Lucyan who said so to torment me. It is only the mourning; black does

not suit me—it makes me look pale; but I will leave it off as soon as you like. I know it is only the black!" and Xenia, with feverish energy, tore the crape-butterfly from her hair, and threw it on the ground; and pulling off her jet bracelets, flung them in a rattling heap on the table.

"No, no, Xenia!" said Kazimir, with a deep-drawn sigh; "it is not that,—it is——"

"It is what?"

"I do not know," he said, sadly. "It is not as it used to be."

"What is not as it used to be?"

"Everything is changed."

"Changed? I knew it!" She stamped her foot. "What do you find changed? Are my eyes less blue? Look at me!" She laughed through her tears with brazen boldness.

"Oh no, not that."

"Has my hair turned grey?"

"No."

"Is my skin wrinkled or freckled?"

He shook his head; "you are as beautiful as ever, Xenia."

"Ah!" she drew a sigh of relief. "Then, what *can* you mean? What is it, Kazimir?"

What was it indeed? Was she not as fair as ever? Was she not free? and did she not love him? Had

he not sighed for her love as for the most precious thing in life? and now he held it!

Could it be perhaps that precisely because he held it, he was able to see at last how poor a thing it was to have sighed for, and to have gained? how little of it, after all, she had to give?

Nothing was changed, and yet everything was changed; it was all different now from what it had been. But the guilt was Lucyan's, and not hers. He it was who had turned the once shrinking girl into this forward woman; he it was who had fostered her vanity to further his own ends, who had taught her that flippant laugh, who had hardened her to blushes, who had debased what intellect she had, changed her modesty into boldness; who had done everything but embitter her sweetness. He it was who, even dead, had left his influence upon her, and who from his grave still pulled the strings of the puppet he had fashioned.

With a good husband, she would have been a good woman. If a clinging plant be trained to grow upon an oak-tree, it will in time raise its head as high as the oak itself; and if it be taught to trail along the mire, it will creep through the mud, obedient to the hand that guides it. It was only that she had learnt her lesson too well; it was only that a beautiful thing had been wilfully spoilt. Oh, it was a pity!

"A pity! a pity!" it echoed in Kazimir's heart,—while Xenia, clinging to his arm, sobbed, and repeated that she knew it was only the black; that it could not be true; that he must love her still—he must, he must! for her vanity, seriously mortified for the first time in her life, lent her a feverish flow of words.

Her arms were round his neck now, and her head on his shoulder. What would he not once have given for this? And now he stood like a statue of ice; keenly aware that this silence, this coldness was ungracious, cruelly ungracious to her; but feeling equally that if he spoke, his words would be more cruel yet. What could he say? Reproaches? he had made them long ago. Explanations? she would not understand them. How should she ever fathom the reason of this change, she who never looked deeper than her looking-glass, never higher than her own exquisite *coiffure*, never lower than her Parisian shoes? Her eyes would have been sharp enough to detect the first grey hair on her head, the first wrinkle on her face, but blind to see that which Kazimir saw in her. No; it was a hopeless task, and he did not attempt it. Softly, very softly disengaging her arms, he led her back to the sofa.

"We should not have made each other happy, Xenia," he said, sadly. "Once I thought differently; but it is I who am to blame, not you. I made a great

mistake, that is all. Forgive me for this suffering—forgive me, if you can. You will be happier when I am gone;" but she only threw herself on her cushions and sobbed, and stormed like a child who has thrown away its plaything, and wants it back again. But the plaything was broken, and could not be mended: there was no glue in the world, nor hammer and nails, which could make the toy whole again. Not even Kazimir could do it. He had been very loving, and very generous; but now his generosity was run dry, his love was exhausted. For many weeks past it had been dying a slow death. He could no more revive it than he could call Lucyan from the grave. There remained but a bitter regret for what might have been, and a poignant pity for the suffering he now saw.

And it was unavoidable that Kazimir should exaggerate the suffering, putting down to the score of her new affection more than was due to it, and forgetting to cast in the balance the large proportion of hurt vanity which caused these tears to flow.

"Will you not say good-bye, at least?" sobbed Xenia, convulsively, and then flew out at him afresh, when he attempted to do as she asked him. It was cruel of him, heartless, inhuman, to speak even of saying farewell; she could not have believed it of him; and the hysterics began again with redoubled force.

The kindest course was to go, thought Kazimir;

and rising softly, he walked to the door. There was no need to tear himself away as he had done once before, and there was no more danger in the lingering look with which he left her, wondering a little at himself for having ceased to love her. The wonder was rather that he had loved her so long.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HANDS AND HEARTS.

"For Love himself took part against himself."
—TENNYSON.

CHOKED with all that patchouli and wood-violet, surfeited with all that beauty, Kazimir stood in the cool passage, and drew a deep breath. Looking back at the interview just ended, there came over him, with overpowering vividness, a sense of the awkwardness, nay, the absurdity of the part he had had to play. A man who refuses the broad advances of a beautiful woman, can never quite escape looking rather like a fool. Kazimir felt a wish to do something which should rid him of this impression. He wanted to be active now, and not passive; and the action, he felt, must be immediate.

Perhaps it was the violence of this revulsion which suddenly ripened a thought that had lain dormant within him for some weeks past. All at once it

started up and stared him full in the eyes; and before he had even quite realised his own resolution, Kazimir was already beginning to act upon it.

He opened one door after another, and looked in hastily; he eagerly traversed the sitting-rooms and the dining-room; he returned again to the passage disappointed,—the person he looked for was not there.

The house was quite silent, except for the far-off creak of an open window, and for the strokes of a vigorous broom which could be heard sweeping a floor somewhere in the distance above. A housemaid might give him the information he wanted, thought Kazimir; and following the sound of the broom, he rapidly mounted the staircase.

Up here there were many doors also, all closed; he followed the sound of the broom from door to door; it led him to the door of an attic-room; but just as he reached it, the sweeping came to a full stop, and the silence of the house was again unbroken. He looked at the other doors doubtfully, not quite sure whether the sweeping had indeed been in here; then, after a second's hesitation, he turned the handle.

A current of cold air swept furiously towards him; the open window gave a jingling bang, and a cloud of whirling dust danced before his eyes.

Through the dust-cloud he saw a woman's figure against the light. She was leaning on her broom and

gazing from the window, but started round as he entered.

"Can you tell me where to find Panna Vizia?"

Kazimir had got thus far in addressing the housemaid, when, meeting her eyes as she turned towards him, he saw that the housemaid was Panna Vizia herself.

"Good heavens!" he broke out, "what are you doing here?"

"Sweeping," said Vizia, coolly, and resuming her work in haste.

"Sweeping! Are there no servants in the house? This must not be;" and acting on his first impulse of indignation, he tried to take the broom from her hands; but she resisted almost angrily.

"Why must it not be?" she retorted, with a sort of savage sullenness.

"But what for? What are you doing to the room?" cried the mystified Kazimir.

"It is going to be my room now, and I am clearing it; I shall be in nobody's way up here."

Following her glance around, Kazimir looked about him, and shuddered a little at what he saw.

This was the same room which, years ago, Lucyan had occupied, when he was still the younger son of the house, and not its master. But the nest, once so cosily fitted up, had long stood deserted; a picture of

comfort then, it was now a picture of desolation. Traces there still remained of what had been; although a lumber-room for years past, there were marks, even here, which spoke of Lucyan. The green box till stood in the window; and though the snows of many winters had rotted the wood, and the sunshine of many summers had blistered the colour from off its sides, the ruin was shelter enough for the few shrivelled corpses of plants, which stood dead but not buried, trembling dismally in the draught. On the wall there hung a scrap of white paper, held by one nail only; and as it flapped upwards, Kazimir recognised the face of one of the beauties out of Lucyan's gallery. She had been the least pretty of them, he remembered. Among the rubbish on the floor there lay the torn-off yellow cover of an old French novel, one which had been in fashion four years ago. There were empty packing-cases and discarded chairs, and mounds of dust on every side; and in the middle of it all stood Vizia, with her head held high and her hair blown rough by the wind, looking as if she were the queen of this disorder, and her broom the sceptre with which she ruled it.

"Do you like the room?" she asked, with a triumphant smile, as if she rather enjoyed Kazimir's evident discomfiture. "Do you not think it comfortable?"

"Not very," said he, with a shiver; for the draught

was cutting, and perhaps the atmosphere from which he had just come had rather enervated him.

"It will do well enough for me; I am not a fine lady, you know; why should I be?"

"But you are not a servant either," said Kazimir, with some heat; "it cannot be proper for a lady to do housemaid's work? Are there not enough of them here?"

"Plenty; but I do not choose to ask them;" and, as though expressly to provoke him, Vizia began to be very busy with the dust-heaps on the floor. "Do you think I am ashamed of sweeping? Did I look ashamed when you came in?"

"You got red, certainly."

"Nonsense! Red? I never get red," said Vizia. turning scarlet. "And if I did, it certainly was not for my broom that I blushed, but only because you caught me at an idle moment,—looking out of the window, instead of at work."

"Why will you persist in degrading yourself?"

"Why will you persist in calling it degradation? Is work a degradation? Do you think I would stay here, beggar as I am, to live at ease and eat the bread which you and Xenia give me, if I could not do something in return?"

"You are talking folly, Vizia."

"Am I? and I should be sensible, I suppose, if I

laid down my broom and obeyed you. Shall I sit on a sofa and wear kid gloves? Is that what you want me to do? Look, I never wear kid gloves now; my hands are getting used to it—look!" she said, with a bitter smile, and held her hands towards him, roughened and blistered with work.

"And Xenia allows this?" cried Kazimir, in horror.

"Of course; and why not? What else am I but a servant in this house?"

"Stop!" cried Kazimir—"stop, Vizia! Will you be its mistress?"

She stood still, as if struck to stone—immovable as a marble statue, and in a moment almost as pale. Her wide eyes were fixed on him with a look that was like consternation. The bitter smile which belonged to her last words still hovered about her lips, though it had no meaning now. Her hands were still held out mechanically towards Kazimir. She drew them slowly back; but, quick to see the opportunity, he had hold of them already.

Now only did her expression change. Her smile faded; she started back proudly, while the colour flamed in her cheek.

"What do you mean? I do not understand you."

"I want you to let me take care of you, Vizia."

"I can take care of myself," she said, quickly.

"But I can take care of you better. You shall never

work again. You have been working for years past, Vizia; why should you not have your turn of rest?"

Vizia stood quite quiet, no longer trying to draw her hands from his. She had not even lowered her eyes, but was earnestly and curiously examining Kazimir's face.

"Do you know what you are doing?" she asked, after a second's pause. "You are asking me to marry you?"

"Of course I am asking you to marry me."

"You mean this seriously? upon your honour?"

"Upon my honour," said Kazimir.

"Do you love me?" she asked, in a sort of breathless haste; and as she asked it she came a step nearer, and, still with her hands in his, stood looking at him hungrily for the answer.

Her lips were parted: her breast began to rise and fall convulsively. In her eyes there burnt an eager light—the sudden upflaring of a hope which she had never dared to foster. It made her into a different woman. In her shabby brown dress, her sleeves rolled up housemaid-fashion, with her reddened hands, her rough hair powdered by the flying dust, she stood before Kazimir, almost beautiful for once in her life.

A silence had fallen in the room; for Kazimir, taken aback by the question so suddenly put, could find no words on the instant. Love? Vizia was ask-

ing whether he loved her? And this he had not even asked himself. A little time ago and he had loved Xenia. Cannot affections be transferred? Could not the fire which had gone out in one place be kindled again in another? Love her? Why, he wished her well, he esteemed her, he was grateful to her, and he loved no other woman—now. Was not that enough? It would have been enough, only that something in Kazimir's heart cried out that he had known another feeling than this, and that he had called that other thing love. He could not give them both the same name.

The silence was not long—only long enough for the loose window-frame to give half-a-dozen melancholy rattles, and the flapping picture to hide its face, and show it again once or twice in quick succession—only long enough for Vizia to live through a whole lifetime of hope and fear, and exquisite doubt and torturing suspense.

Kazimir was true to the heart's core, and yet he would have said the lie. Nothing but the lie could still that hungering look on her face. If it was a lie to say that he loved her, why, then, the world had been all along mistaken about lies. A lie, such as this one, must be a good thing; it could do harm to no one, and great good to that woman, who hung on his lips for her answer.

Kazimir's tongue would have said the lie, but his eyes could not; and before he had spoken, she checked him.

"Do not say it! I know the answer. I would not hear a false word from you. You do not love me."

"I will make you happy," said Kazimir, earnestly.

"You do not love me," said Vizia, again; and she took her hands from his. It was strange how, at the very moment that the suspense was broken, the flash of light which had beautified her went out. The flame, dying in her cheek, left her face of a grey paleness; her eyes lost their fire; her lips their tremulous curve.

"And if you do not love me, why have you asked me this?" said Vizia, in a tone of sharp suspicion; but before he had time to answer, her mind, travelling along the line of thought she had awakened, had found an answer for itself. "Oh, it is clear; I might have guessed it sooner. You offer to marry me because I am poor; you want to undo the harm which others have done. I am a beggar, yes; but I am not quite beggar enough to accept your pity, even when you give it by the name of your love."

"I will not call it love, then," cried Kazimir, vehemently; "call it what you like, but trust yourself to me. It is true that my brother has ruined you as

he has ruined others; and it would be no more than justice if, to repair the effects of that harm, I were to work at your happiness."

"At the cost of your own," said Vizia, sharply.

"I understand you; but you mistake. That dream is over."

Vizia eyed him keenly.

"It may be true, and I do not wonder. You have come straight from her now; perhaps it is by contrast that you find me worthy of regard to-day."

"You have no right to talk like this," cried Kazimir, stung to the quick by her tone; "you have no right to impute to me motives. My offer is honestly meant; and what right have you, either, to belie your own heart? For all your fierce words, you know, Vizia, that you love me."

Vizia covered her face with her hands; but after a moment she looked up resolutely. "Yes," she said, in her hardest, most ungracious manner, with no trace of womanly softness either in eyes or tone,—"yes, I have been foolish, very foolish and weak. I love you,—I have loved you for long."

"Then you cannot refuse me," and Kazimir, with new eagerness, tried to take her hands again; but Vizia shook her head, and clung once more to her broom, as though it were the weapon with which she meant to fight him.

"You quite mistake me. It is just because I love you that I cannot marry you."

"I never quite understood you, Vizia; and I certainly do not understand you now."

"Do you not see? If we were indifferent to each other, I might marry you, and be satisfied with the humdrum sort of affection which is all you could ever give me; I might have put up then with having merely a good friend in my husband; but this way, this way —it is too much of an experiment."

"Let us try the experiment," said Kazimir.

"You may be willing to try it, I am not. I never was beautiful; in ten years I shall be a middle-aged woman, and you still a young man. You will be sought after by the world, by women, and you would want pleasures which you would not find at home."

"Never!" said Kazimir, with a very wise smile. "I have outlived all that." For he honestly believed that his power of affection was exhausted for ever, and that the romance of his first love was never to have a sequel.

"I should torment myself and you," went on Vizia, calmly. "I should persecute you with my jealousy. No: you are too handsome, too successful, too brilliant a man to be my husband."

"Indeed, Vizia, you underrate yourself, and you

overrate me. Such dangers as you talk of are no longer dangers for me."

Vizia laughed. "How old are you? Not quite thirty-one, I think. And your heart is dead, is it? And you will never love again? And the world has no more perils for you? Bah! Tell that to some one else, not to me. You will thank me for this some day; you will thank me as soon as your mortified vanity has stopped smarting. What would be the use of my being a woman if I did not see, more clearly than you do, what it is that makes you speak now? It is pity that moves you, and gratitude, and perhaps some sudden reaction; but that will not do for me. How can you dare to say that your heart is dead, or that you will not love again? Believe me, Kazimir, though I am no prophetess, you will find some other woman to love, and to love you; just as surely as that pretty child below-stairs will find plenty more men willing to marry her, and each of whom she would willingly marry."

But the problematical woman of the future had no power over Kazimir as yet; just as he felt no particular taste for the shadowy men amongst whom his late love was to make her choice.

"Do not put me off with words, Vizia," he urged, more vehemently. "Your reasons are no reasons; you can give me no ground for refusing me, except

that you love me. Why will you speak only of your cousin's future and of mine? What is your own to be?"

"I know well what it is to be," said Vizia, in a whisper; and Kazimir saw that her eyes were wet now, and her lips quivering. It made him think that she was yielding.

"Have I conquered you, Vizia?" he said, bending towards her; but this time she gave him no answer, —only she shook her head, and taking up his hand she kissed it once, impetuously, passionately, then quickly passing him, she left the room.

She was crying before she reached the bottom of the stairs; but her tears did not alter one whit of her resolution.

A nature like hers could not have rested satisfied with anything short of the most perfect form of love— so perhaps Vizia was right in her decision. But, again, had she not allowed her morbid pride to stand between her and her one chance of happiness?

Perhaps Vizia was wrong.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AITZIG'S SCORE.

"I do believe,
Though I have found them not, that there may be
Words which are things, hopes which will not deceive;
. . . . . .
That goodness is no name, and happiness no dream."
—BYRON.

As Kazimir closed the door, and stepped out into the chill autumn air, he felt that he had likewise closed a chapter in his life.

"I think I could have made her happy; but she would not have it so," he said, with a sigh, which he could not himself have explained. Was it for the woman who loved him, or for the woman he had loved? or yet for another woman, who had never really lived, but whom a strange fancy sometimes showed him lying buried in the Tarajow churchyard?

He had mounted his horse, and was spurring it down the garden-road, as though anxious to put a barrier between himself and the past. He was going to return

to his old self,—to what he had been before he had dreamed the dream from which he had now awakened.

Vizia's words had impressed him more than he was aware,—they had revived again his confidence in life; and yet he would not believe that they contained a prophecy. He told himself that he would be a soldier again, and nothing more, with no other interests but a soldier's interests. His career should be his one care; his comrades should be his brothers; his sword should be his mistress; his country should be his world. He had spent much time in gathering roses; but they had fallen to pieces in his hands, and wounded him with their thorns. Henceforward he would look for laurels only.

It might have been these thoughts which made him pass through the garden in heartless indifference to the roses that were dying on either side of him. Like children who have lost their nurse, they seemed to stretch out their seared arms towards him imploringly. The few late flowers that still lingered raised their frost-bitten faces in mute supplication. Would no one take pity on their agony? The winter was coming; and was there no one to wrap them up in their warm straw blankets, and save them from the frost's cruel bite?

But Kazimir passed them by unheeding. Nor did he notice, either, how the grey clouds had lowered,

until they seemed to rest on the earth; nor how the drizzling rain had gradually turned to sleet, and from sleet to a small driving snow; neither did he take heed of the wind which piped sharply past him, scattering the russet leaves before it.

He rode on quicker, impatient to be gone: there was nothing more for him to do here. Yes; but there was something more. Aitzig Majulik must be waiting for him now; he had said he would be back with him in an hour, and the hour was past already. Not that the promised secret had excited his curiosity: it might be but one of the unrealities in the delirium of the dying Jew. How was he to guess that the words which Aitzig intended to speak would have torn away the last shred of that veil which hid from his eyes the whole extent of his brother's villany?

Would it be better for Kazimir, or worse, if the words remained unspoken, and if his trust in human nature, which, although shaken, still lived, was allowed to survive also in the future?

He thought now that his last words to Lucyan had been unnecessarily bitter; but when once he should know the secret of that Propinacya lease, he might well think that they had scarcely been bitter enough.

Straight into his face was the snow-drift flying, and all around him the silent trees took voice. Like the wild long notes of a dirge, the wind swept towards

him; and with it came other sounds, as weird, and scarcely more human.

Dimly at first, then more and more clearly, could Kazimir distinguish a mass of dark figures flying towards him through the snow-drift,—carried along, as it seemed, by the breath of the blast alone; for, fast as they flew, the wind flew faster; and seizing upon their long black garments — the scarfs around their necks, their floating beards, and even their snaky curls—it blew all out straight before them, tearing them all one way.

Running as wildly as though the Evil One himself were at their heels, beating their breasts and uttering unearthly howls, did they fly towards Kazimir. And in their midst they bore an open bier; and upon it, scarcely covered, a human form was to be defined. A withered hand, half buried in the silver-worked folds of the *Tales*, for a moment met Kazimir's eye.

Like a picture in a nightmare—like the mere phantasmagoria of a fevered brain—like a troop of spirits born of the driving snow and the doleful wind—they passed him.

And as they sped along, their shrieks and their groans carried off before them, the burden of their lament ran somewhat like this:—

"*Wai! Wai! Wai!*

Let us weep and rend our garments; for there is mourn-

ing in the house of Israel. Let us bewail our brother who is passed away. He lived the life of the just, and he has died the death of the righteous; and he shall sprout again and bloom like the herb of the field, like the flowers of the earth; for he has been gathered to his forefathers, even to the great patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Let us weep and rend our garments, and strew ashes on our heads, for Aitzig Majulik, who has gone before us!

"Wai! Wai! Wai!"

THE END.

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